1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3

Despite the influence of Mohammedanism in the north, there are certain similarities in religion to be found everywhere. Even among the Mohammedans, magic is as potent as it ever was, and as St. Mery correctly observed for his time regarding the Mohammedan slaves, the aboriginal gods have by no means been forgotten. On the west coast and in the Congo, however, pagan religions having a degree of complexity which accords with the complexity of the other aspects of these civilizations are found everywhere. Magic constitutes only one aspect of these systems in which pantheons of deities, each pantheon and each member of each pantheon with its special function, are held to control the destinies of the world and of man. The ancestral cult is another important aspect of West African belief, with the spirits of the dead envisaged as living on in another world, yet alert to manifest power for good or evil among their descendants. Not only in cosmology, but in ceremonialism as well are there patterns that characterize all West Africa. The worship of the gods through the dance, and the phenomenon of possession of devotees by their deities; the place of song in worship, and the special character of this music; the use of drums and other percussion instruments such as the rattle and iron gong in religious rites; these again are elements which all slaves in Haiti, no matter what their tribal affiliations, had in common.

Nevertheless, as one studies Haitian folk-custom and folk-belief today, recognizable survivals of traits from the cultures of all the tribes that have been named are not to be found in anything approaching a comparable degree. Little of Senegalese practice is to be seen at present, while similarly, at least in the valley of Mirebalais, far less Congo derivatives can be discerned than would be expected when the vast number of Congo slaves imported into Haiti are recalled. Practically no traces of Gold Coast or Ivory Coast custom and belief are discoverable; the word "Ibo" appears from time to time, and several Ibo gods are worshipped; Nago deities, as will be seen,

1; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3

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merous contemporary accounts, and most present-day works, give both texts and illustrations which make the economy of the plantation clear.[32] Though many stories of the magnificence of plantation life are found in current works, writers of the period seem to agree that but little attention was paid to convenience. Inventories of the contents of houses show that furnishings were at a minimum; a few chairs and small tables in the sitting- and reception-rooms, beds and minor accessories in the way of furniture in the bedrooms, dining-room tables and chairs and a cabinet for dishes. These pieces were usually built in the colony and made of native hard woods; substantial, they were essentially plain. As Baron Wimpffen remarked, "Taste, Sir, is still Creolian at Saint Domingo; and, unfortunately, the Creolian is not the right taste, — it smells too much of the *Boucan*." [33]

The table set was not distinguished. Meat, though the most important dish at the principal meals, was poor, but, on the other hand, fish, game, and wild fowl were excellent, and the best of French wines were available.[34] Whatever the fare, however, it was served in the grand manner, often on plate rather than chinaware, and by the many liveried house-servants which every great establishment could boast. An account of the mode of service has been preserved in the reminiscences of one who, writing some years later of a repast served him in 1787, says: "There were many more of these domestics of both sexes than there were diners. I could but admire their attention to the smallest details of the service, the whiteness of their clothing, and the beautiful kerchiefs in the Créole manner elegantly arranged about the heads of the women. . . . But all of them moved about on bare feet; this was the distinctive sign of slavery." [35]

As portrayed in contemporary works, Haitian white life is seen to have been lived entirely in terms of material goods and of display. Just as there was little intellectual life, so religion was but a matter of form. One M. de Larnage, writing from

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3

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Petit-Goave on 25 June 1743, complains that it is unbelievable "what indifference the people of these districts have toward spiritual matters." [86] So little attention was paid to the rites of the Church that when the baptism of an infant was to be performed, it often proved difficult to find a godfather who had taken the sacrament, and many children were therefore never baptized. As might be expected, the churches were in a bad state, often having no more than earthen walls and floors, roofed with thatch, and being used as threshing-floors as well as places of worship. The description which Père Labat has given us of a church at Cap Français,[87] and of the manner in which the communicants conducted themselves during such services as were held, shows the decadence of the one religion that had any place among the white inhabitants. The clergy, too, reflected this same decadence. For though the early libertines who posed as priests were later replaced by members of such orders as the Jacobins, the Jesuits, and the Capucins, even this did not end the scandals that, from the first days of the establishment of the Catholic Church on the island, marked its ministrations.

What impression must the Negroes have obtained from their opportunities to observe the life of their masters? What patterns of behavior, what moral codes, what concepts of the way in which the Europeans regulated their own lives and, as officials, regulated the lives of others, must have been stamped on the minds of these Africans? That the present emphasis on the importance of wealth, or that a love of and demand for display, should characterize Haitian life of the cities today is not strange. Nor is it difficult to comprehend how certain other aspects of Haitian life that have so been underscored in the last half-century by those who have written of the Haitians should have developed from this initial stimulus — not to the extent to which this emphasis would lead one to believe, to be sure, but enough to give a basis for the exaggerations which have been published.[88]

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3

attitudes of these writers were in the main far from sympathetic toward Haiti, and their interests extended but little to the customs of the great masses of Haitians. That the fear of slavery was still alive in the early part of the nineteenth century is apparent from an incident related by Mackenzie; [44] that, some decades later, the sense of racial differences continued to exist is evident from folk-sayings about the characteristics of whites, mulattoes, and Negroes recorded by St. John.[45] The concept of rank seems to have maintained itself in its full flavor, with no lack of social classes in Haitian urban society and no lack of vigor in perpetuating the earlier prejudices of caste.

The majority of the population remained on the land, for by 1830 the great estates had been completely broken up, and were cultivated in the main by small concessionaires. The dress of these country inhabitants seems to have remained much as it had been under French control, and the emphasis on good manners that so marks African social intercourse had been retained to such an extent that St. John, no admirer of the Haitian people, was forced to remark upon it.[46] Markets which were conducted in African fashion had been established, and these were supplemented by itinerant peddlers. The institution of *placage*, a reconciliation of African plural marriage with the monogamy of European custom, of which more will be said in a later chapter, was known in the early days of independence. The rites of birth and death were marked with their special ceremonies, and in both instances it can be seen that the African elements of the cultural heritage were not being forgotten. Dancing continued as the principal form of recreation, and to the traditional dances, which still persist, were added European styles.[47]

Above all, African religious customs were being observed. *Vodun* rites continued to flourish and magic was practiced as in the days preceding independence, as is to be seen from the notorious and all too often repeated tale of the "Congo bean

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3

stew," which has continued current from the time of its publication by St. John until today.[48] Yet African religious practices were being constantly combated by the Catholic Church, for even in the period of revolt the priests had remained largely unharmed, and when Christophe was elevated to the throne, he appointed two archbishops. After the establishment of the Republic, Catholicism continued as the State religion, so that by the early nineteenth century, as Mackenzie mentions, thirty-eight clergy were active in Haiti, all under the control of the Bishop of Santo Domingo, and all presumably nominated and paid by the President of Haiti.[49] Though for a period there was an attempt to develop a national Church, the missionary work done during the colonial days left too strong a tradition of Catholicism to be overcome, and consequently a Concordat was signed with Rome in 1860, which has remained in effect ever since.[50]

Though the story of the cultural history of Haiti between 1804 and the present cannot thus be more than sketched, yet the background is known, and enough can be gathered from accounts of Haitian life during this interval to enable us to see that the varied cultural impulses were shaping the lives of the people throughout these years. With some understanding of the roots of the resulting culture in French and African traditions, then, let us once more turn to the valley of Mirebalais and consider the life of the Haitian peasant as it is lived today.

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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82 planted at other times will spoil. Similarly, millet and maize must not be harvested during these periods, or small insects will eat the grain. "No crop whose root is used for food may be planted during the forbidden phases of the moon," say the educated cultivators also, citing experiences of their own or of their neighbors who, being skeptical, planted their potatoes or other tubers during the wrong phase of the moon, only to have them completely spoil. In some instances not only the phases of the moon, but entire months are held unpropitious for planting. Thus July is regarded as a "weak" month for planting potatoes and plantains, while April, May, June, and August are preferred ones.

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[191] As in all Negro cultures, the Haitians dare not ignore the supernatural powers that rule the universe, where the question of getting a living is concerned. In the valley of Mirebalais, if the land where a field is to be made has a stream, a cock must be sacrificed to the spirit that resides in it, together with oil, peas, and some non-intoxicating drink. In making

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539 the offering, protection is asked against those who might steal from the field or injure it:

> *"Maitre Source, moin mandé pou' ou gadé jardin moin vini fait ici. Cé pas pou' ou laissé méchant, malfaiteur contrarié tout ça moin mété nan terr'a. Si moin bien récolté, moin va bà ou un pile mangé.* — Master of the Stream, I pray you to protect the garden I have just made here. Do not permit any evil designing person to harm all that I have put into the ground. If I harvest well, I will give you much food."

An invocation such as the following might also be pronounced on this occasion:

> *"Jesu Christ, les Saints, Marassa, les Morts: M'ap' travaillé; m'ap' planté graines-là. Pou' fai'l donné pou' moin, pou' m' join, pou' m' bai' Mystères, les Saintes, les Marassa, les Morts.* — Jesus Christ, Saints, Twins, the

1; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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CHAPTER VIII

WHAT IS "VOODOO"?

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More than any other single term, the word "voodoo" is called to mind whenever mention is made of Haiti. Conceived as a grim system of African practices, it has come to be identified with fantastic and cruel rites and to serve as a symbol of daring excursions into the esoteric. Not only has emphasis been placed on its frenzied rites and the cannibalism supposed on occasion to accompany them, but its dark mysteries of magic and "zombis" have been so stressed that it has become customary to think of the Haitians as living in a universe of psychological terror.

What, then, is "voodoo"? "Voodoo," or *vodun*, as it will be termed here, following native pronunciation, is a complex of African belief and ritual governing in large measure the religious life of the Haitian peasantry.[1] It also has an even more restricted meaning in Mirebalais, where the word often simply denotes a form of sacred dance accompanied by spirit-possession or merely a dance which on occasion may take its place along with the *calenda*, the *martinique*, the *zesse*, and other social dances at public celebrations, where an occurrence of possession would be rare and in questionable taste. This latter meaning was recognized by St. Mery:

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"The Calenda and the Chica are not the only dances in the colony which have come from Africa. There is an-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

other one which has been known there for many years, principally in the west, which bears the name of *Vaudoux*. . . . But it is not only as a dance that the *Vaudoux* merits consideration, for it occurs under circumstances which assign to it a place among the institutions where superstition and bizarre practices play a considerable part." [3]

In Dahomey, whence the term has come, *vodun*, as has already been stated, signifies "god" and is a general name for all deities. This source of the word has likewise long been known, as a reading of St. Mery shows:

> "According to the Arada Negroes, the real followers of *Vaudoux* in the colony . . . *Vaudoux* signifies an all-powerful and supernatural being on which depend all the events that come to pass on this globe." [4]

Similarly, de Vassière [5] quotes with approval a parallel definition from Peytraud, while modern Haitian writers also emphasize its Dahomean origin.[6] This meaning of the word had, however, undergone a change in its new home even during pre-Revolutionary times, for, according to St. Mery, the "all-powerful and supernatural being" had come to be a non-venomous serpent that stood as a symbol "for all those who professed this same doctrine." Today in Mirebalais even this identification is a thing of the past, though the prominence given serpent-worship in Haiti by most writers [7] would make it reasonable to suppose that elsewhere in the island serpents are maintained by priests of the *vodun* cult and play an important role in the rites at which the gods are worshipped. Indeed, one priest from Arcahaie encountered in Mirebalais mentioned the fact that in his own temple he kept such a snake. Yet in our valley no worship of serpents as such was encountered, and there were even those who declared that they had no hesitation in killing any snake, though these brave assertions could not be tested. Serpent-worship in Mirebalais

1: Herskovits E-4,5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

may perhaps be said to have come to this: Adherents of the African cults refrain from killing the snake, and should they do so by accident, the African custom of giving ceremonial burial to any creature having supernatural importance is followed as an atonement. Where this is omitted, difficulties of so serious a nature are felt to threaten that to prevent them a priest of the cult is called upon to offer up a sacrifice and to beg forgiveness even after the little ceremony of burial has been performed.[7]

Inasmuch as *vodun* flourishes in Mirebalais despite the minor role of serpent-worship, it is evident that in seeking to understand its nature and its philosophy other aspects must be considered. Two historical facts must be kept constantly in mind in making this analysis, for without them, what follows would be meaningless. The first is that *vodun* derives from a background of African theology and ceremonialism. The second is that the Negroes have continuously been subjected to the influence of Catholicism during the centuries that have passed since their introduction into the island.

Yet another point may prove suggestive in providing a useful point of view for an analysis of the *vodun* cult. This bears upon a difficulty impossible and happily unnecessary to resolve in the field study of religion, which arises out of the degree of variation in answers to questions dealing with the same point. These answers differ not only according to the status of the individual in the cult, since layman and priest have understandably different concepts of the functions of deities based on unequal degrees of expert knowledge, but the extent to which an individual has religious interests or is indifferent to them influences the nature of his responses. A fundamental fallacy results from the fact that except where there is an officially sanctioned theology — which makes for dogma, and often for perfunctory worship, in contrast with the living dynamic nature of Haitian peasant belief and ritual — there are no "real" answers to questions in the field of religion. The

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

student pursuing the "correct" statement will find that no matter how painstaking his method and how extensive his precautions, the versions of different persons can never be entirely reconciled, unless a false appearance of truth is given to his findings.[8]

If the underlying philosophy of the universe held by the Haitian is summarized, as it can be abstracted from his expressions of belief and from his observed behavior, this philosophy might be phrased somewhat as follows: The ruler of the universe is God, its Creator, who shares this task with His son Jesus, the saints of the Church, and the Holy Ghost. Man has been endowed with a soul, and the soul, which has come from God, returns to God for judgment and, if necessary, for punishment at the end of its sojourn on earth. From Africa — *Guinée* — the Negroes brought other deities, termed variously *loa*, *mystères*, or *saints*,[9] and these deities have been inherited through succeeding generations by the descendants of those who brought them to Haiti. The specific function of the African spirits in the Haitian system was given in the following terms by one of their devotees: "The *loa* are occupied with men, their task is to cure. They can make a person work better than he otherwise would. When the *loa* possess people, they give helpful advice. But they cannot do the things that God does. They can protect a garden, but they cannot make a garden grow, for streams, rain, and thunder come from God." Another statement clearly shows the same concept: "God made the *loa*, but did not make them so they might do evil. When a man purchases a *loa* for money, that spirit will do evil as well as good, but God becomes angry and will not accept these bad spirits into the sky, and He drives them away."

In the ordering of his daily life, however, the forces which are foremost in the consciousness of the Haitian make up the triad expressed in the phrase "*les mystères, les morts, et les marassa* — the *loa*, the dead, and the twins." Because of their special character, an examination of the twin cult and the cult

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

are differentiated according to the types of healing in which they have had the greatest success, and the "miracles" to their credit, such as a *hungan* who had achieved a wide reputation for being able to resuscitate dead children. One *hungan* of the valley is spoken of as having powers which rank him with the greatest in the land, but now that he is old, a nephew of his is being called upon to act in his place. In a relatively short time, say his friendly clients, he will take his place even among great *hungans* elsewhere.

Under the *hungan* and *mambu* are assistants called *hunsi*, or sometimes, in the case of men, termed *adjanikon*. In some parts of Haiti, particularly in the plain of the Cul-de-Sac and the southern peninsula, there are degrees of initiation for the *hunsi*, which include the ordeal by fire that makes them *hunsi kanzo*.[20] In Mirebalais, however, the *kanzo* rite, though known by name, is neither required nor performed. The *hunsi* and *adjanikon* know the rituals in a general way, hold and wave the banners used to salute the gods, sing the songs for the *loa*, aid in bringing the possessed dancers out of their possessions, and perform such other ritual tasks as helping the officiating *hungan*. Some members of the cult group have special ability to sing large numbers of the ritual songs for any *loa* which may be called, while others perform the animal sacrifices. It is among these male assistants that the most expert drummers are found.

This, then, constitutes an outline of that system of belief included under the term *vodun*. Once more, in summary, it may be emphasized that *vodun* is neither the practice of black magic, nor the unorganized pathological hysteria it is so often represented to be. The gods are known to their worshippers, and the duties owed them are equally well understood. The reward for the performance of these duties is good health, good harvests, and the goodwill of fellow-men; the punishment for neglect is corresponding ill fortune. On this basis of belief is erected the ceremonial of worship.

1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

CHAPTER XI

THE CULT OF TWINS AND OF THE DEAD

SHARING powers and prerogatives with the *loa* in the supernatural world are the souls of the dead, the spirits of twins, and, in a specialized sense, magic, all working parts of a universe the ultimate force in which is God, who is sometimes spoken of as its Gran' Maît'. Their relative importance, however, is not easy to determine; and much less the manner in which the supernatural personalities in these divisions are linked with one another. Therefore, when such problems are presented to a group of Haitians, as whether or not the dead become *loa*, or the spirits of twins are related to those of the dead, or whether twins are the equivalent of the *loa*, or what the role of all these in magic may be, different opinions will always be heard.

One of these matters was explained by an elderly *hunsi* as follows: "*Marassa gagné morts longtemps, li deviennent loa* —Twins who have been dead a long time become *loa*," and "*Gagné gran' moun morts longtemps, deviennent loa*— There are those long dead who become *loa*," and she added: "But how this happens, I do not know." Despite a flat contradiction of this opinion by a man who was present, and a heated discussion between them, she persisted in maintaining the

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

CHAPTER XII

MAGIC, GOOD AND BAD

In opening any discussion of Haitian magic, the fact must be stressed that magic, though but one of the forces active in the universe, is a system in itself. As such, it is a thing apart from the *vodun* cult, a point which must also be emphasized, for although most writers draw a perfunctory distinction between magic and *vodun*, this distinction, once stated, is too often promptly lost sight of.[1] At the same time, the differences between the worship of the *loa* and the practice of magic must not be so juxtaposed as to name the second as the antibody of the first. For, though some of the *loa* can work harm, and some of them, indeed, are primary forces behind the working of evil rather than beneficial magic, the good and bad they do is general in nature. Magic, on the other hand, whether good or bad, always operates in very specific instances: to cause a given woman to love a given man, or to make a certain field of a certain enemy yield poorly.

Yet these distinctions, when drawn, are found in practice to be neither as sharp nor as consistent as the foregoing statements might imply, especially since the system of magic is empowered and validated by many of the *loa*, as well as being closely affiliated with the cult of the dead. The phenomenon dealt with here, and its not illogical contradictions, arise, however, from the fact that the realistic African world view has by

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

no means given way to that separation of the categories of good and evil that governs much of European thinking. A *loa* that helps a man when friendly toward him may, if slighted or vexed, set about to do him harm, or, at best, merely remain passive when danger is to be averted. For the *loa*, like human beings, are creatures of mood and may take umbrage at some act which had created no displeasure before. Similarly, not all uses of magic are necessarily reprehensible, something at once evident when it is pointed out that much of Haitian folk-medicine derives its psychic force from its magical basis. In short, Haitian belief, of which magic forms a part, does not allow a world view drawn only in blacks and whites. All tones of gray are found, and these merge one into another almost imperceptibly, as the fortunes of a man wax and wane during his lifetime.

That the Haitian envisages his universe in terms other than those of warring and changeless powers of good and evil should not be taken for a moment to mean that he fails to draw a clear distinction between the benevolent and malevolent forces behind the magic employed in specific instances. This realization is reflected in the terminology he gives the charms that are the outer symbols of these supernatural powers, the *garde*, *arrêt*, and *drogue* protecting him against harm, the *wanga* being the carrier of dark magic, and the antisocial agent. The actuating forces behind these charms come from all important members of all groups of *loa*, to say nothing of God and the saints of the Church; but the charm itself is a thing which results from the control of these by man himself: "*Wanga, moun qui fait ça* — It is men who make *wangas*."

One other point may here be clarified, since it has made for confusion: namely, the fact that when the Haitian employs the term *magie* he does not mean what the European signifies when using the word "magic." To the student, the vast body of Haitian magico-medical practices, prescribed and administered by both those who know how to manipulate the super-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

about to eat such food, for he feels a shudder pass through his body, and his arm becomes heavy, as was the case with a woman who three times dropped a piece of "beef" she was about to place in her mouth, before she realized the warning.

It can readily be seen how varied are the manifestations of evil magic. What are the forces behind them? What gives them power? What makes their unsavory ends possible of attainment? Their power comes from God, for, according to belief, everything comes from God, in the sense that God made the world as it exists. Therefore all beings are free to do anything they can contrive to do, though once dead they are called to account for their deeds. "Good and evil are two brothers; life and death are two brothers. All four come from God. They do not come from the *loa*."

But more immediately this power comes in great measure from the dead. Before a *bocor* makes a *wanga*, he asks permission of God, the Devil, Maît' Carrefour, Maît' Cimitière, Maît' Gran Bra, and Maît' d'l'Eau. Baron Samedi, perhaps the most important figure among those who aid in working black magic, lives in the cemetery. Though he is a *loa* and may possess those who appeal to him to work evil, this role is subordinate to his role as the power behind magic that kills. He controls the souls of those whose end has come as a result of magic, and when he is called at midnight, the sound of the clanking of chains is heard as he comes. He is envisaged as a dwarf. After his approval has been purchased for a projected deed, appeal is then made to Gede, for especially where it is a question of killing, though everything may have been made ready with Baron, Gede must "dig the grave." Herein lies the importance of Gede, for he is the court of last resort, the final power in matters of death.

Gede, however, is just, and even though Baron has marked a victim, Gede can refuse to concur in his decision. "If you do not merit death, Gede will refuse it," say the Haitians. It therefore sometimes comes about that though all preparations have

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

CHAPTER XIV

CATHOLICISM AND VODUN

In considering the origins of Haitian religious belief and ritual, those African elements which have been retained in their aboriginal purity may be first presented. The importance of the Dahomean and Nigerian elements in the *vodun* cult are self-evident when the deities derived from the peoples of these areas are detailed. It has been stated that the name of one of the important "companies" of gods, Rada, is a contraction of the word *Arada*, which is the name of the Dahomean town Allada. This group includes Dambalia Wedo, Aida Wedo, Aizan, Legba, Agwe Woyo, Agweto, Sobo, and Sobo-Bade, which come directly from Dahomey, where they are members of the heavenly pantheons; and Agasu, Siligbo, and Loko, who are sacred ancestors of Dahomean relationship groups. The term *Dahomey* itself also figures in the name of such *loa* as Erzilie Freda Dahomey, where Freda with all consistency represents a corruption of the name of Whydah, a Dahomean seaport. The Nago, or Yoruban peoples of Nigeria, have a religious system which parallels that of Dahomey, so that many Rada gods, such as 'Batala, the Yoruban "great god," or Ogun, the Yoruban deity of war, or Shango, the god of thunder, are of Nago origin; Badagri, on the other hand, is the name of a Nigerian town. A prominent *loa* derived from this general area not found to be exclusive to the Rada group is Gedeonsu, or Gede, a Dahomean totem. Of the Pétro group, Wangol (Roi

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

tion is a further comment both upon the human traits ascribed to them, and upon the realism with which they take cognizance — as only African gods can — of the financial position of their devotees!

It is not only in the immediacy of the Haitian gods to their worshippers and in their human qualities, however, that these beings have retained African traits, for in the full reciprocity that must prevail in the relationship between deities and their followers is to be seen a point of view that is entirely non-European. Between man and the gods the rule of *quid pro quo* must always be in operation; and this rule may only be regarded as but another contribution of Africa toward Haitian religious ideology. While this reciprocal giving flavors all aspects of worship whether it be of the *loa*, the dead, or the twins, it takes a yet more prominent, and more familiar place in the field of magic, since here the *engagement* owes much to European belief, though the element of reciprocity is much more emphasized than was ever the case in medieval European diabolism.

The psychological values of the *vodun* cult, especially the general tone found in the feeling toward the terms *Guinée* or *Rada*, perhaps most convincingly show the attitudes that aided in the retention of things recognizably African. For while the [184] Pétro gods are by no means viewed as altogether bad, or are always held unwelcome, the fact that in Mirebalais, as in Haiti generally, the Rada gods are those least feared, most desired, and in connection with whose cult wrongdoing is most rarely present, is of the greatest significance, especially when the related fact is recalled that the Pétro gods are the more powerful in the matter of evil magic, while the Rada deities are said to exert their power to protect their devotees from the dark forces that may be set in motion against them.

In attitudes toward the gods, then, in the names of the gods themselves, in the manner in which they function in the lives of Haitians, and in the importance of the ceremonial con-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

nected with them, much of African tradition which has carried over into Haitian religious life has been retained in pure form. Yet the intrusion of Catholic custom into these African patterns — often noted, though generally in passing — also must be studied if the significance of the forms of Haitian folk-religion is to be grasped. That this aspect of *vodun* has received the scant attention it has had is probably to be ascribed to two causes.[2] The first takes the Catholic element for granted, so that even where a particularly dramatic element of Catholic practice is seen in an African setting, such as a crucifix or the portraits of the saints on a *vodun* altar, specific mention is made of this without attempting to dissect its historic or psychological role. The second reason for the comparative disregard of Catholic influence is that for Europeans it is a commonplace. Spirit possession and sacrifices, African song and drum rhythms are more "exciting" than prayers or hymns of the Church. Underlying both these causes is the deep-rooted and unquestioned assumption that, in contact with any non-European culture, the patterns that govern European behavior must prevail. Consequently, is it not in the nature of things that Catholicism should have taken root in the *vodun* cult? Is not rather the matter to be stressed that African traditions should have been retained at all? That the process should actually have been one of amalgamation rather than of dominance is rarely taken into account. Yet to go deeper into the significance of this process in Haitian life is to open far-reaching vistas.

An outstanding sanction taken by the *vodun* cult from Catholicism is that of the baptismal rites. Though ceremonies of consecration are a commonplace in Africa, and the African ritual of washing the head — *lavé tête*, as it is termed — has not been forgotten, in Mirebalais the importance of baptism as a means whereby human beings obtain their place in this world and in the next has been carried over and applied to all matters of ceremonial significance. Thus just as in the lives of

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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the saints of the Church the sacrament of baptism was a crucial rite, so the *loa* must be baptized before they become forces which act in a recognized and predictable manner. Just as the objects used in the rituals of the Church must be sanctified by being blessed and sprinkled with holy water, so in the *vodun* cult a *humfort*, the drums, the iron, and the rattle must all undergo a similar sanctification, not only that they may possess proper supernatural power, but more importantly that they may perform their functions in the very serious and African matter of calling the *loa* and placating the supernatural beings of the *vodun* cult.

Herein lies the importance of the *prêt' savanne*. Since the official representatives of the Church not only have nothing to do with the *vodun* cult, but excoriate it on all occasions, the *prêt' savanne*, as a man who can read the prayers of the Church, plays an indispensable role and to that extent is to be regarded as a functioning member of the *vodun* cult, despite the fact that he has no control over the *loa* and, as far as was observed, does not participate actively in their worship. At the same time, it must not be inferred that in borrowing "baptism" from the Church this rite has been elevated to the most important place in the ritual of the *vodun* cult, for though the *prêt' savanne* must read prayers "from the book" and sprinkle his holy water, the actual "baptizing" is carried out by the *hungan*. In sanctifying a *humfort*, the end in view is to induce the *loa* to come after the baptism and to insure that no unaccountable or untoward deeds may come to pass within it. Similarly, though drums must be baptized with Church prayers and holy water that they may perform their allotted tasks, without the concomitant ritual of the *hungan* they would be no more empowered to call the gods than they were before the prayers of the Church were read over them. An analogous comparison can be made between the role of the *prêt' savanne* and that of the *hungan* in the *service*. Since the world

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overturn his memory, overturn his thought, overturn his house, overturn for me my enemies visible and invisible; cause the thunder and the tempest to break them into pieces. And in honor of St. Bouleversé, three Paters and three Ave Marias. . . .[8]

Thus it is seen how Catholicism invades the beliefs and rites of the *vodun* cult. In an analogous fashion *vodun* has not failed to make itself felt in certain festivals of the Church,[9] for while elements of *vodun*, rigidly suppressed inside the Catholic churches, are absent except in so far as they can be carried on surreptitiously, they are nevertheless integral parts of these fêtes in the minds of the folk who make pilgrimages to them. So arresting is the resulting mingling of practices, and so significant for the amalgamation of cultures that has taken place in Haiti, that a detailed discussion will be given of the most prominent instance of this type, the festival in honor of the Virgin of the Palms, which takes place each year on July fifteenth at Ville-Bonheur, or, as it is better known, at Saut d'Eau. The festival of 1926 has been described by Price-Mars;[10] here certain observations made during the fête of 1934 may be given, especially as they have to do with those aspects of the mythology which validate the festival, and as they illustrate the non-Catholic, voduistic phases of the celebration, of importance for the points being considered in this chapter.

Beside the church, Ville-Bonheur has three especially sacred spots, St. John, En bas Palmes, and Saut d'Eau — the falls themselves. At St. John is a large *campêche* tree surrounded by many palms, from beneath which flow streams of water. St. John is said to have appeared here, carrying his scepter as in the chromolithographs, and at that time water began to flow in the sacred springs, and except for one short period has continued ever since as holy water, being used for drinking and bathing, but never for purposes of cooking. The priests

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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devotees prophesied and healed the sick. Even at the church, however, where all go to offer the prayers that are the central observance of the fête, the many candles placed on the rocks at the entrance are usually for St. Anthony; that same St. Anthony who, it will be recalled, is the *loa* named Legba, the guardian of all entrances.

It is obvious, from the examples given, that the world view held by the Haitian and the motivations which underlie Haitian life cannot be understood unless both the Catholic and the *vodun* contributions to them are held in mind. But certain further questions bearing upon the effect of these two influences present themselves. What proportion of Haitians hold membership in the Church, and how many are affiliated with the *vodun* sect? What attitudes are manifested toward the Church and its priests as contrasted with their attitude toward the *loa* and their ministrants? How does the Church meet the challenge of *vodun*? And how does the Haitian peasant, in his inner life, reconcile these two conflicting forces?

The impression gained from reading available works on Haiti is that voduists and Catholics constitute two distinct groups. While this may obtain in some parts of the Republic, it is not true either in Mirebalais or in those other portions of Haiti which came under direct though brief observation in the course of this study. All discussions with natives that began with the assumption of the existence of two such separate groups led to confusion, and statements which had seemed evasions were not clarified until the incorrectness of such an assumption became apparent. Thus when it was stated that in all Haiti the Pater Noster was one of the first things taught every child, the question: " Is this not true for Catholic families only? " was met with a vigorous denial that was slowly justified as the realization grew that, if not true for all Haitians, such an assertion was certainly valid for the vast majority of them in Mirebalais and probably elsewhere.[18] The identity of membership in the two groups became apparent from ob-

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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servation when, for example, the baptismal rites which received into the Church the children of known active participants in *vodun* ceremonies were witnessed. It became even more convincing when experience taught that the best place to encounter an elusive *hungan* or *mambu* was at early Sunday-morning mass. Only when it was realized that no dichotomy exists in Mirebalais between Catholicism and *vodun*, but that both are necessary if all the supernatural beings that control man and man's destiny are properly to be worshipped, was a true perspective obtained.[13]

There are certain Protestant sects which have been increasingly successful in making converts among the Haitian people, particularly in the north, whose adherents stand in strong hostility to *vodun*. A type of Protestantism that has had the best reception is one comparable to the "shouting" sects of the United States and the British West Indies, where the appeal through patterns of possession, dancing, and other aspects of ritual close to the familiar African forms of behavior is evident and relatively little psychological shift is needed to make membership in such a church acceptable.[14] The Protestant church in Mirebalais, however, is more sober. It commands only a very small proportion of the townspeople, and draws even fewer from the surrounding countryside, while the Catholic voduists look upon it with a scorn that is exemplified in the answer to a question about the ritual of Protestant funerals: "*Moun chita, chanté zhymnes*—People sit, and sing hymns!" Two or three well-substantiated cases of conversion to Protestantism came about because, despite the sacrifices made to the inherited *loa* and the prayers to the saints, these individuals continued to experience ill fortune, until in desperation the Protestant minister had been called to banish the family *loa*, to cut down the sacred trees on the family habitation, and to destroy the house of worship, with the objects in it. These deeds of "desecration" were, however, followed by no renewed disasters, and while from the point of view of

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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the voduists this is not regarded as decisive proof of the power of Protestantism, for those immediately concerned it is held sufficient.[13]

What, then, of the attitudes held by voduists toward the Catholic Church? The correlation of Catholic ritual with *vodun* practice made by Haitians is of utmost significance in this connection. In discussing the Church service, it was pointed out that church bells announce mass or any other rite, and this, it was explained, is for Legba — *" Toute cloche c'est pou' Legba, même l'église, oui* — All sounding of bells is for Legba, even in church," for he must be notified so that he can " open the gate " for God, Jesus Christ, and the saints. *" Nou' même nou' connai' ça. C'est Bon Dieu crée tout* — You yourself know that. It is God who created everything." It was also recounted how when the priest preaches, he is possessed by the *mystères* of the sacred Trinity, for does he not gesticulate and become excited like any other possessed person?

Furthermore, it is believed that Gede, Ogun, and Damballa " are always at the church," often insisting that their worshippers take communion. Indeed, occasionally the *loa* of a woman may demand a Church marriage from a man to whom she is a *placée*. The sacraments of baptism, first communion, marriage, confession, and extreme unction are received by members of the *vodun* cult, though, as will be seen, when voduists confess, they say nothing of their *loa*. The *hungans* themselves " are most often at the sacred table to take communion," and one particular *hungan* not only attended mass, but was seen continually employing his rosary in the *vodun* ceremonies at which he officiated. While Haitians from the southern peninsula stated that the *hungans* there do not go to church, it was pointed out at the same time that all other voduists attend regularly.

The principal resentment held by Mirebalais voduists against the Church is for the cost of Church rites, and for the

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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today the church takes full advantage
of its status as the only recognized religious organization in Haiti to dictate the official position of government toward *vodun*. Permission for *vodun* dances and for *services* must be obtained from the officer commanding the local detachment of the Garde d'Haiti, and this is not always granted. Penalties for illicit dances and ceremonies are severe, and because gossip is ubiquitous and no man lacks enemies, apprehension is prompt. Thus in the instance of one *service*, a misunderstanding regarding the permit was sufficient to cause the detention for some hours of the one responsible for the rite.

Is it possible, then, for a person to be a communicant of the Church and partake of the sacrament without feeling this weight of spiritual and official disapprobation? More particularly, is it possible for him to omit from his confession all allusion to his worship of "false" gods? It is here that one encounters a singularly tenacious survival of African traditional belief. In Africa the conquest of one people by another meant the mutual interchange and acceptance of the respective deities. The conquerors added to their own pantheons the gods of those whom they had overcome so that these forces might not wreak a supernatural vengeance upon them; while to the conquered the power of the gods of those who had defeated them was self-evident. If the worship of the Christian God and of the saints of the Church intruded on the aboriginal religious patterns of the Negroes brought to Haiti, the acceptance of such worship did not imply rejection of the old gods. Nor does membership in the Church today mean such complete acquiescence in its doctrines and pronouncements that the worshipper of the *loa* will offer himself for the malediction of the priest by confessing his adherence to their cult. The situation somewhat parallels that in Africa itself, where the first effort of Protestant missionaries is directed toward inducing their converts to abjure polygyny. This dictum is complied with readily enough on the surface, so that a man will have but one wife — in one village! In Haiti the

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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problem of confession is met in the manner explained by a woman who is a devotee of the *loa:* "The *loa* are not the things of the priest. Why should I tell him about them? If I come and take this book of yours, it isn't mine, and I am a thief. If the priest tells me I must not worship my *loa*, they are not his *loa*, and he cannot take them from me. Does anyone expect me to come and tell him that my father, my mother, my sisters and brothers, and all my family serve the *loa*?"

For the Haitian, therefore, the forces of the universe are under dual control. And though, as has been stated when the cosmology of the system of *vodun* worship was discussed, he may reconcile this duality, yet in practice he must observe the rites of his *loa* separately; he must pray to God and the saints apart. His reconciliations he keeps to himself, and in his everyday life both the African beliefs and those of the Church have their place. No better illustration of this could be had than in the incident of the white cock named for the serpent-god Damballa, that had been spared until the final day of this field-work when, as the last of a large brood, his time had come to be killed for the table of his owner. On this afternoon, when he was "to meet his destiny," the cook took him up quietly. A number of feathers were plucked from him, and then, as the sharp knife, describing a cross, ended his life, the whispered phrase could just be heard: "*Damballa, je crois en Dieu* — Damballa, I believe in God."

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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CHAPTER XV

SOME WIDER IMPLICATIONS

No student of Haitian institutions can elude a progressively sharpened awareness of the psychological conflict that is being waged within the frame of Haitian society. And though examples of the divergent forces which lie at the root of this conflict have been set forth in the preceding chapters, some of the more important of these may be recalled here.

In his social relationships the Haitian is constantly exposed to the demands of a code of morality which requires marriage to be monogamic. Yet the African tradition of polygyny, and the undoubtedly satisfactory arrangements of both an economic and a social nature that can be made under the terms of plural marriage, pull him toward this form. The case is even stronger in the field of religion, which in Haiti is not a thing remote from life, but an intimate part of existence. On the one hand, because of his inheritance of the *loa*, he must meet his obligations toward these ancestral gods of Africa who punish harshly those who fail them, so that he must either continue their traditional worship or learn to know the consequences of their anger. Yet on the other hand, the priest thunders his maledictions and threats of eternal damnation—in Mirebalais, at least, often in Créole, a language which the peasant can understand—against those of his flock, the vast majority

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

of whom are sincere practicing voduists as they are sincere practicing Catholics, who do not put an end to the worship of false gods.

The absence of graphic and plastic arts in Haitian culture, commented upon in a preceding chapter, must also be regarded as a case in point in laying bare the anatomy of this inner conflict of tradition, since it is important to recognize that the suppression of these forms of the prevalent African tradition would seem to have lost to the Haitian an important outlet for the resolution of inner tensions caused by pent-up drives. Even more revealing is the substitution of games of chance for those games of skill which in most African and New World Negro societies are played for their own sake alone — that is, for the prestige accruing to the skillful player. The strain that accompanies this play for stakes, often of no inconsiderable value in terms of the resources of the players, is patent to the most casual observer. The question here arises whether or not the craving for excitement of this kind may not in Haiti be traceable to the inhibition, under slavery, of some of the more gracious forms of African life which there make for social equilibrium. Might it not represent a kind of compensation for the thwarted psychic ease with which a culturally undisturbed people approach their own existence — a state of being which, in contrast, is quite lacking in Haiti?

A singularly illuminating comment upon these manifestations of instability in Haitian life has been made by Dr. J. C. Dorsainvil, who in drawing his conclusion called both upon his own medical training and on his experience of many years as a profound student of his own people. " It has perhaps been insufficiently remarked to what an astonishing degree the Haitian people live on their nerves." [1] As might be expected, he advances a number of possible explanations of the causes that underlie this state of " living on nerves." The wear and tear of life in the tropics is given as one reason; another is the excitement of the *vodun* dances with their frenzy of possession;

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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[2] Mackenzie, ii, 124.
[3] St. John, 162.
[4] Cf. Price-Mars (I), 201–2.
[5] Price-Mars (I), 205, gives this as the proper age for a man of the region of Kenskoff, near Port-au-Prince, to marry.
[6] Cf. Price-Mars (I), 216.
[7] Ibid., 211–12. A facsimile of this letter is given on pp. 213–15.
[8] Ibid., 216–17.
[9] Mackenzie, i, 38.
[10] St. John, 145–6.
[11] St. John, 145.
[12] Mackenzie, i, 57. Wirkus, 222, mentions a case of polygyny on the Isle à Gonave where the wives apparently inhabited one compound with their mutual husband.

CHAPTER VII

[1] This seems to differ in various parts of Haiti; thus, near Port-au-Prince, the father of the girl "designates to his future son-in-law the land where his house is to be built," according to Price-Mars (I), 216.
[2] Cf. Parsons (I), 163.
[3] Among the obligations of the peasant mentioned by Price-Mars (I), 34, is "the respect due to the elders who are the repositories of tradition."

CHAPTER VIII

[1] Whether or not *vodun* is a religion, a problem which Haitian writers (e.g., Price-Mars (I), 32 ff.) are prone to debate at length, need not be considered here, since to an ethnologist the answer is too patently affirmative to require discussion.
[2] St. Mery, i, 45–6.
[3] Ibid., i, 46.
[4] De Vassière, 178–9.
[5] Dorsainvil (I), 156 ff.; Price-Mars (I), 39.
[6] For a useful resumé of statements concerning Haitian serpent-worship, the grievous misunderstanding of which is an outstanding characteristic of this honest but ill-conceived work, see Williams, *passim*.
[7] Price-Mars (I), 118 ff., also records his belief that serpent-worship is far less important than it has been represented, saying: "We believe it to be well-nigh abolished." Seabrook, 310–12, also holds to this view.
[8] Parsons (I), 157, states: "There is little or no philosophic or religious expression of the theory to be

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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heard in Haiti, but descriptive details of the practice abound." Elsewhere (p. 158) she speaks of "this higgiety piggiety pantheon" of *loa*, whose traits "none . . . [were] . . . able to describe . . . at all systematically." Price-Mars (I), 32, however, mentions the existence of a theology based on African beliefs not unlike that described here.

9 Cf. Parsons (I), 168.

10 Nowhere is the confusion with which writers on Haiti have approached and presented *vodun* theological concepts better exemplified than in the passage found in Craige, 98–9; or 71, where a charm for working evil magic is spoken of as "something having to do with voodoo."

11 Despite the importance of possession, one would hesitate before accepting in its entirety the somewhat simplistic approach of Dorsainvil that "*le vôdou se ramène à l'idée de la possession*," (I), 113.

12 St. Mery, i, 35.

13 Parsons (I), 169, note 2, speaks of baptism, but states "*loi* Pétrou is one you do not baptise, as you do other *loi* when they come . . ." — a custom at variance with Mirebalais procedure.

14 Cf. Parsons (I), 163, however, where the meaning of *marré* is given "to get the spirit."

15 See Parsons (I), 164–5, for a description of a "shrine" of a worshipper of the *loa*.

16 Cf. Dorsainvil (I), 115 ff.

17 This is undoubtedly the explanation of Seabrook's "hermaphroditic god" called Papa Nebo (Gedenibo), which he shows on pp. 9 and 10 of the plates of his book. As is indicated elsewhere in this volume, Gede, who does not partake of this characteristic in the least, has thus been woefully misunderstood by Seabrook.

18 Dorsainvil (I), 72–4, describes possession at a *vodun* ceremony, and Wirkus, 173 ff., also gives a description of a possession scene, but his account is pitched so hysterically as materially to lessen its usefulness for serious comparisons.

19 (I) *passim*, but especially 18–19, 58–61, 86–7, 111–12. A definition of *vodun* more acceptable to those who approach social phenomena from an ethnological and historical point of view is to be found on page 130. Price-Mars (I), 123 ff., gives an extended criticism of Dorsainvil's hypothesis, though from quite a different point of

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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[10] (I), 169 ff.

[11] The tale of the priest's paralysis is also told in Price-Mars (I), 172.

[12] According to Price-Mars (I), 171, there are three classes of religionists in Haiti: Catholics, voduists, and those who hold simultaneously to both forms.

[13] Cf. Dorsainvil (I), 40–2.

[14] See Price-Mars (I), 138–9, for a description of the services in a "shouting" American Negro church he visited in Washington, D.C., which makes the point brought forward here.

[15] Compare Dorsainvil (I), 18–19.

CHAPTER XV

[1] (I), 60.

[2] Herskovits, M. and F. (III), and Herskovits (III).

[3] Herskovits (I).

2: Courlander 8-5 (1937-1965) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

one seed from that tomato would ever take root under the hot sun. Some time later, when I knew this man well, I talked to him about the care with which seeds must be planted if they are to grow properly. I told him how *we* grew *our* tomatoes. He listened carefully, nodding his head. When I had finished he said: "Yes, that must be a good way to do things in your country. But here in this valley God is good. He does not forget his children. From the broken tomato many plants will sprout. When God is good to you, you do not have to count the seeds." I suggested that perhaps one should not waste any of the precious seeds that God had provided; and to this he replied: "How is there waste? My garden is made to flourish by Zaka [the country man's special deity]. Some people give Zaka a feast every year, but between times they forget. Zaka helps me in my work, and I don't forget him. When I break the tomato and put it on the ground that way, it is a little taste for Zaka. Whatever I plant, I give him some. He is good to me, I am good to him."

What I learned from many incidents like this one was that the eye does not always see correctly. The old man was not just planting tomatoes, nor was he performing a conventionalized ritual act. It was a highly personalized act of faith in nature and confidence in the deity who shaped his work.

A large part of this book deals with Vodoun, the religious practices based on West African traditions. One soon discovers that the songs and dances of Vodoun ritual are not merely music and motion supplementing and decorating more serious affairs. Virtually every aspect of Vodoun ritual is placative or invocational. The songs that are sung and the dances that are danced are direct supplication of various supernatural forces.

Undoubtedly, a number of principles which are put forward in this study do not apply equally to every region of Haiti; but they are, I think, true in general terms. Not until one has accepted the fact that different explanations exist for given phenomena, that the same rites are performed in different fashion in different places, and that the cult priests themselves do not agree on many details, may one begin to work toward a general view of the Haitian scene.

All of Haitian life is not Vodoun. And there are of course some Haitians who are relatively outside the central circle of its influence. But the inner meanings of Vodoun and its relationship to the total view of life permeate the entire scene. Music, too, binds together practically the entire fabric of Haitian existence. It is essential not only to the cult temple but to countless workaday activities. Agrarian work groups often perform their tasks to the accompaniment of a drum. And in the cult temple, the iron hoe of the fields often serves as a percussion instrument.

The Drum and the Hoe is the result of studies made over a period of

[P. 8]

2. Man and the Universe: Vodoun

When the African slaves stepped ashore in the New World they brought with them highly developed religious beliefs and attitudes toward life. But Africa was a continent of many cultures and nations, and its belief systems varied. The Congo African did not have the same view of the natural and supernatural as the Senegalese, for example; and even neighboring peoples such as the Ibos, the Yorubas, and the Mahis did not have common religious traditions. Yet in the strange new land that was Haiti, the common elements in their religious beliefs were accented. In time a new composite religious system emerged. It was called Vodoun.

The preponderance of Africans in Haiti came from the region of Dahomey, Togoland, Nigeria, and the Congo River basin. Among them the Dahomeans were the most numerous, and it was they who provided the framework for the Afro-Haitian religious system.

The word Vodoun itself is Dahomean in origin. Among the Fon-speaking people of West Africa it signified "spirit," or "deity." In Haiti the word came to be applied in a general sense to all the activities of cult life, from the ritual of the "temple" to the songs and dances, though in some old songs it still applies specifically to the idea of a supernatural spirit. However, the Congo word *lou* came to be used to designate the deities.[1]

In a literal sense, Vodoun in Haiti consists of the rites, beliefs, and practices of the Vodoun cult, built around the similar religious systems of the Dahomeans and the Nagos. In a wider sense it applies to similar but distinct ritual activities of other cults. The Ibo-Kanga rites and dances are in a specific sense "not quite" Vodoun. The rites in the Congo-Guinée cult group—made up of Congo, Bambarra, "Guinée," and miscellaneous elements—have separate practices and deities of their own, and are often regarded as not Vodoun at all. Yet the term Vodoun is used in a generic sense to include all these rites, and examination of the beliefs and activities of these cult groups shows that they have drawn in considerable measure upon a common inheritance.

[1] [See Courlander, Haiti Singing, p. 7. Cf. P349, Category 116.--Analyst]

2: Courlander B-8 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Vodoun is clearly more than ritual of the cult temple. It is an integrated system of concepts concerning human behavior, the relation of mankind to those who have lived before, and to the natural and supernatural forces of the universe. It relates the living to the dead and to those not yet born. It "explains" unpredictable events by showing them to be consistent with established principles. In short, it is a true religion which attempts to tie the unknown to the known and thus create order where chaos existed before.

As in Dahomey, it is not a system imposed from above but one which pushes out from below. It is bred and nurtured in the family, in the towns, and in the fields. It is common law, with deep roots in an unbroken and continuous past. The priests of Vodoun do not control it and direct its course. They, like the least fortunate peasant, simply move about within it and make use of its resources. They are its servants and its interpreters. In their cult centers, the principles of Vodoun are brought into sharp focus and dramatized. Vodoun is democratic in concept. Any man or woman may have direct contact with the deities or dead ancestors without the intervention of the cult priest. There is no place or situation beyond the influence of the loa or beyond the limits of Vodoun. At every crossroads is the spirit of the crossroads guardian, Legba, and on every long trail is the spirit of the Master of the Highway.

The cult priest nevertheless plays a significant and essential role. He translates beliefs that otherwise might tend to become amorphous into formalized action. He is a teacher, a repository of cult learning, and a vital catalyst. He gives form to abstraction, and practical meaning to symbols. He is the intellectualizing agency of a tremendous emotional force. Through his knowledge of the substance and forms of Vodoun, his experience in dealing with the loa, and in some instances his capacity to set magical forces into action, the cult priest is a dynamic power within his community.

Though the making of *pouins* and *magie* (ritual magic) and *ouanga* (aggressive magic directed against individuals) is within the realm of the cult priest's activities, these things are part of Vodoun only in a subsidiary sense. Magic lurks on the periphery of Vodoun. It has little or no place in the placating of the deities or the dead. It concerns the relationship of the living with each other and with *loa-garou* (*loups-garous*) and *baka* (demons). Although cult rituals include various pouin and magie ceremonies, the cult priest draws upon magic as he draws upon other mystic arts and fields of learning—leaf doctoring, divination, Catholic ritual, and Masonic symbolism. He attempts to bring together all thinking that widens the scope of Vodoun, in order to strengthen his hand to deal with

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

all aspects of the natural and supernatural. But the reputable cult priest does not dabble in "black" magic—the kind that maims or destroys human beings. One who does so is said to "work with two hands": one for the loa and one for evil. (The expression *servi dé main*—"serving with two hands"—is also applied to a cult chief who deals with deities of more than one "nation.") Many a cult priest in making his ritual flour drawings on the earth holds his left hand behind his back and draws with his right, giving testimony that he "works with one hand" only.

Each cult priest maintains his own cult temple, or *hounfor*. There are no cult officials above him, as there is no formal religious organization beyond the hounfor itself. Within his own special community he is therefore the chief religious functionary, the apex of an intratemple social organization. Under the cult priest, ordinarily, there are two grades of assistants, and below them two classes of servitors.

The cult priest is usually referred to as a *houngan*, a Fon (Dahomean) title signifying "spirit chief." Sometimes he is called *gangan* (a Bantu word meaning "conjuror" or "doctor")[2] or *caplo*. He also is known by the title *bocó* or *bocor*, which seems to be derived from *bocono*, the diviner or priest of the Dahomean Fa cult.[3] The bocor is, in fact, sometimes referred to as a *divineur*, and he is regarded by some Haitians as a clairvoyant and a practitioner of magic. As in Dahomey, the bocor in Haiti foretells fate through the throwing of shells or chips, much in the manner of the secular game *mayamba*. He also reads destiny with small sticks or ashes. In earlier days the cult priest was sometimes known by the Yoruba name *babalao*, a title which has been corrupted to *papaloi*. A female cult leader is known as a *mambo*. She is presumed to have, in a general way, the same powers as the houngan, though in some quarters her *connaissance*, or "understanding," is not regarded so highly, and her status is believed to be somewhat lower.

Directly under the houngan is his chief assistant, the *laplace*, and perhaps a little below him on the ladder, the *mambo caille*. The laplace is regarded as the vice-houngan, and he assumes responsibility for running the hounfor in the absence of his chief. The mambo caille, a woman, runs the cult center in the absence of both the houngan and the laplace. One step farther down the ladder is the *hounpténos*, who acts as a sort of chief of the main body of devotees. These high-ranking assistants to the houngan are sometimes called *badjécans*, or keepers of the altar.

The servitors of the cult are known as *hounsi*, or "spirit wives," a name that was given to certain categories of cult servants in Dahomey.[4] There are two main groups of hounsi: *kanzo* (those who have passed through a ritual fire test) and *hounsis* (those whose loa are wild or untamed). The

[2] [Footnote appears on P. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

[3] [Gover, Africa Dances, P. 129; Herskovits, Dahomey, I, 208 ff. Cf. P. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

[4] [Foot note appears on P. 349, Category 116.--Analyst]

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

In Haiti the possession takes many forms, according to the nature of the deity who has entered the body, and depending on whether the possessed person has learned to "control" that deity. The possessing, or "mounting," of the possessed individual is manifest proof of the loa's existence and his constant proximity. Vodoun is built upon the premise of the existence of loa, and the possession is the instrument of direct contact and of constant proof of the loa's imminence.

Although much of Vodoun is cast in the Dahomean mold, it is no longer what it was originally in Dahomey. Many of the original deities of the Dahomean Earth pantheon, the Sky pantheon, and the Thunder pantheon have survived. Others have been forgotten, but in their place there has grown a vast array of loa, recruited partly from the Yoruba deities and perhaps from deities of other West African tribes. By far the largest group has come into existence in Haiti—loa whose names, at least, probably would go unrecognized in West Africa.

There have been prolific intrusions into Vodoun from the rites of the Catholic Church, though they have not affected the general framework of the system. The original Dahomean supreme being, Nananbuluku, is nearly forgotten; in her place the Christian God is named in many a Vodoun service. Yet, though God is the supreme creator, giver, and taker, it is the loa who must be supplicated and mollified. Most important Vodoun rituals are begun under the supervision of the *prêt' savane*, or "bush priest," who leads off with brief prayers from the Catholic rites. While the Catholic Church itself rejects any direct part in Vodoun, the self-tutored prêt' savane, unordained and unsponsored by the Church, brings elements of its theology into the hounfor. The origins of the prêt' savane are not clear. But there is little doubt that his place in Haitian life became assured during the years of conflict between postrevolutionary governments and the Church of Rome. After the slave revolts of 1791, the priests of the French colony fled from the scene or went into hiding along with the other white colonists. From the date of Haitian independence throughout the following half century, Haiti was "in open schism from the Roman Catholic Church."[1] Some Haitian presidents were friendly toward the Catholic Church; others even had the objective of making Catholicism a state religion with the president at its head. Henry Christophe, for example, made the Catholic Church official but stipulated that ecclesiastical decrees must be approved by the president. Alexandre Pétion's constitution for southern Haiti (the country was divided) also established the Church as official but laid upon it strong restrictions.

Leyburn points out that in 1814 there were in Christophe's kingdom only three priests, one of whom Christophe had named archbishop. Dur-

[1] Leyburn, The Haitian People, p. 119. Cf. p. 349, Category 116. -- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-8 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

of the Catholic Church and fused with old folk beliefs of Europe. In Dahomey, which was the wellspring for much of Haiti's culture, there was no supreme deity quite like the one introduced to the slaves by the missionaries. There was a pantheon of gods with Mawu and Lisa at the top. They were children of a common parent, Nananbuluku. None of these deities was strictly comparable to our idea of a supreme being. Nananbuluku survives in Haiti as Nananbouclou or Nananbélécou, one of many loa. Among the neighboring Yoruba the high god was Olorun. Like the Dahomean Mawu and Lisa, Olorun was quite remote from the lives of men. The gods who were invoked and placated were the several hundred *orisha* created by Olorun. The nearby Ashanti people had a simpler pantheon, with the sky god Nyame supreme among them.

In the present Haitian concept of the supernatural, God is at the very apex of the pantheon, though he is distinctly of another order. His power as the supreme source of all things is fully recognized. A Haitian song, associated with Vodoun ritual but of probable recent origin, goes:

C'est Bondieu qui voyé moin, quand li vlé moin l'apprend. [Ex. 37]
It is God who sent me, when he wants me he'll take me.

Another song, from the Guinée service, goes:

Oh, Kitta, oh so'ti nan dleau, li tout mouillé!
Oh, nen point houngan passé Bondieu nan pays-ya! [Ex. 36]

Oh, Kitta comes out of the water, he is dripping wet!
Oh, there is no houngan in this country greater than God!

Although it is recognized, or at least stated, that God is a supreme force, God is not regarded as the entire supernatural force of the world. In many Vodoun services the houngan may invoke, as separate categories of the unseen, the loa, the dead, the *marassas* (twin spirits), and God. Haitians do not have a consistent schematized picture of the supernatural world. God comes first, but (as in West Africa) he is less immediate than the loa. He is identified with destiny; yet within the framework of that destiny man's lot can be bettered or worsened through dealings with the dead, the baka and lou-garos (demons and vampires), and the cult priests.

In many of the folk tales of Haiti, God appears as another character in a cast which may include as protagonists animals, loa, Christian saints, and ordinary men and women. One such tale is about a visit which all the dogs decided to pay to God. They started off through the woods together, but one of them was distracted by the smell of carrion. He left his friends for a brief time, found the carrion, and ate some of it. Then he hurriedly joined his companions again. Together they came to God's house and were admitted to the parlor, where they sat around making polite conver-

2: Courlander B-6 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

The importance of water in Vodoun has a fundamentally West African character. Among the Yoruba and the Ashanti and in Dahomey, for example, water rites are a significant aspect of religious ritual. Herskovits notes the frequency of religious pilgrimages to streams in West Africa.

> In one instance, at Abeokuta, a bedecked procession of worshipers left a shrine atop a high hill, followed a long path to the riverside over two miles away, and returned before the ceremonies could be carried out at the shrine of the god. On one occasion, in Dahomey, the bed of the sacred stream run dry was "filled" from nearby wells so that this water could be ritually redrawn for use in an especially important ceremony. Among the Ashanti, pilgrimages to Lake Bosumtwe and other sacred bodies of water regularly occur. And it is on such occasions that the spirit of the river or lake or sea manifests itself, by "entering the head" of the devotee and causing him to fling himself, possibly possessed, into the water.[8]

So it is also in Haiti, where possession at the river's edge may cause the devotee to leap into the river. At Saut d'Eau, possessed persons plunge into the waterfall without regard for their safety, being in the care of the loa who have mounted them.

Into this water complex the Christian rite of baptism has been easily absorbed, providing merely a new act of veneration for water and its properties. In the Haitian mind baptism is not far removed from the *lavé tête* ritual, the washing of the head, or the *rafraîchi tête*, the "refreshing" of the head, both of which are acts in propitiation of the loa.[9] So related is the baptismal concept in the Haitian mind, that the term "baptize" is used to describe the lavé tête; it is said that the loa is being "baptized." So also are drums "baptized," not to menton yams, and even the hounfor itself.

Marriage to a Loa

Although the term *hounsi* (spirit wife, or wife of the spirit) is applied to a large class of servitors of the Vodoun temple, only a small number of servitors ever pass through rites which give them a husband-wife or wife-husband relationship with a loa. Reasons for these mystic marriages vary, but usually the rituals take place upon the prescription of a cult priest who interprets the will of the deities concerned. Most of the mystic marriages of which I have heard have taken place in the general area of Port-au-Prince and the Cul-de-Sac Plain. In some other areas of Haiti it appears that no such rites have taken place locally within the memory of the elder inhabitants. One aged man living near Belladère declared: "It [marriage to a loa] is impossible. People serve loa, they do not marry them. A man does not marry his burro. A loa

8 [Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past, p. 233. Cf. p. 351, Category 116. -- Analyst]

9 [It is of interest to note the perseverance of traditional attitudes toward water rites in certain negro cults in the United States. River baptism often is attended by ecstatic seizures in familiar form. Cf. p. 351, Category 116. -- Analyst]

2: Courlander B-8 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Hait! SV3

[P. 349]

Notes

CHAPTER 1: *The Making of the Haitian* (pp. 1-7)

[1]The name Ganda survives in Haiti as the name of a deity.

[2]Herskovits, in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (p. 47), provides a tabulation of raw data found in the manifests recorded for slaves shipped to Virginia between 1710 and 1769: 20,564 slaves were reported shipped from "Africa," 3,652 from Gambia, 6,777 from "Guinea," 9,224 from Calabar, 3,860 from Angola, and 1,011 from Madagascar. Of those shipped from the island of Madagascar, 473 were listed as coming from Mozambique.

[3]Bartolomé de Las Casas.

CHAPTER 2: *Man and the Universe: Vodoun* (pp. 8-18)

[1]See Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, p. 7.

[2]Schweinfurth in *The Heart of Africa*, II, 31, says: "In Loango all exorcists and conjurors are called *ganga*." Leo Wiener, in *Africa and the Discovery of America* (Philadelphia: Innes and Sons, 1922), III, 32, reports: "Forms of *ganga* have in Bantu the meaning 'medicine' but also 'magic'—such as Nyika *ganga* and Kongo *nganga*."

[3]Gorer, *Africa Dances*, p. 120; Herskovits, *Dahomey*, II, 208 ff.

[4]From the Fon *houn-so* or *houn-su*. Among the Arada of Dahomey a *houn-su* was regarded as a spiritual wife of the deity. She was a servant of the cult temple, and in some instances a wife of the cult priest.

[5]Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haiti*, pp. 57-59.

[6]Deren, in her *Divine Horsemen* (pp. 119 ff.), gives an excellent report of a service for Agwé in a boat at sea. Aubin (*op. cit.*, p. 108) seems to have given the first description of this service at sea for the loa Agwé.

[7]Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 119.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 123. Leyburn advances the theory that Vodoun developed during this period as a result of the vacuum left by the Church. Although the Church did in effect leave the field to the African cults, one must assume that the Arada, Congo, and other cults were already organized and possessed of great vitality before the Haitian revolution. Implicit evidence points to a continuity of cult life from the earliest days of the African on Haitian soil. There are no statistics to reveal the extent of cult membership at the end of the eighteenth century, but the content and form of Vodoun today are so overwhelmingly African that it is difficult to think of Haitian cult activity as the product of a renaissance.

CHAPTER 3: *The Loa: Gods of the Haitian Mountains* (pp. 19-29)

[1]The term *vodoun*, used in this precise sense, conforms to the original Fon (Dahomean) usage. The term *hounsi*, also of Fon origin, signifies "spirit" and belongs to the same root

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114 121 treatment. In the absence of sufficient analytic material on the intervening years since his book was written, a prefatory note such as this can do little more than comment on Haitian society, either in terms of its present design or in terms of the recent events that may have modified it.

121 114 The central thesis of Leyburn's book is that Haitian society is sharply 565 divided into two segments, and that the national institutional struc- [178] ture is such that no significant alteration in that division has occurred in the entire course of Haiti's history as a sovereign nation. At the base of the society is the rural agricultural sector, making up perhaps as much as 95 per cent of the population; at the top the elite, which dominates the governmental apparatus and all national institutions. These two segments of the society differ, in Leyburn's view, in all important regards: level of income, source of income, education, language, religion, social forms, values and attitudes, and all else. By carefully describing the history of Haitian society from the eve of the revolution until the midst of the United States occupation, he reveals both the origin of this vast social cleavage and the various means employed for its perpetuation. Leyburn was so impressed by the gap which separated yeomanry and elite that he chose to label these social segments castes rather than classes. Members of the elite earn their livings as rentiers, merchants, professionals, and in government, and never engage in manual labor of any sort. They are predominantly urban in residence; their sons attend private lower schools, and then [191] go on to higher education, usually abroad. They are French-speaking, [197] although they also speak Creole, Haiti's national language. Elite re- [58] ligion is Catholicism, elite forms of marriage and domestic organiza- [59] tion are "legitimate" and "western." Elite members view themselves [829] as a kind of aristocracy, and feel little commonality in their sharing of Haiti and of Haitian history with the yeomen.

114 565 191 771 583 595 144 In sharp contrast, the yeomanry is rural, poor, works the land, is illiterate and Creole-speaking only, believes in *vodoun* rather than in orthodox Catholicism, usually marries by common law and is sometimes polygynous, and remains substantially isolated from the outer world. Finally and importantly—though its particular significance is changing—the elite differs from the rural sector in that the countryman is predominantly negroid in phenotype, while members of the elite are prevailingly lighter-skinned.

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643 At the same time, the President has expressed his favorable interest
771 in vodoun and is said to practice it; this statement, however, has
795 overtones of malevolence that are not appropriate. Vodoun is a religion, though it lacks a centralized priestly hierarchy or administrative organization. Outside the elite, Catholicism in Haiti has always been colored by vodoun elements. The Haitian people as a whole invest no effort in distinguishing what is "really Catholic" from what is not, in their religious practices; in this regard Haitian countrymen do not really differ from folk practitioners of Catholicism anywhere. By its misreading of the piety of the Haitian masses, and its unceasing hostility to vodoun—quite different from the church policy in the so-called "Indian countries" of Latin America—the Church had failed to secure its influence over the Haitian people. In contrast, Duvalier's understanding of Haitian religious sociology has proved superior, and is consistent with the *authentique* ideology of the 1940s, though doubtless much more extreme in its implications.

642 Finally, the Duvalier regime has invaded such institutions as the
871 National University and the trade unions, and maintains close sur-
467 veillance over any individuals it regards as politically suspicious. Loy-
204 alty oaths are required at the university; a public press no longer ex-
661 ists; the unions, never strong, are now entirely powerless. But it should be clear from this description of the Duvalier regime that repression is not the key to Duvalier power so much as the means for perpetuating that power under Haitian conditions. The key to Duvalier power is to be found instead in the structure of Haitian society,
642 in the social history of the past two decades, and in the policy of the
648 United States, weakened by its inescapable preference for "stability" over "radicalism." In his own way, President Duvalier is as radical as he can be; but he is no Castro. It is now an open secret that Haiti's support for sanctions against Cuba approved at Punta del Este was matched by economic concessions from the United States; that the Marines, knowingly or not, immobilized anti-Duvalier opposition in a period when its supporters could be picked off, driven into exile, or jailed; that the official Duvalier offer of Môle St. Nicholas to the United States as a substitute for Guantánamo, though irrelevant, was warmly reassuring to some North American political thinkers; and that Duvalier, while he employs considerable "blackmail diplomacy" in his dealings with the United States and is now out of favor, is still considered "reliable" in that most important respect.

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The peoples of the islands were able to maintain some continuities with
177 the past, even while the new setting and changing conditions led to the development of certain innovations in society and culture. In a few Caribbean societies, Haiti included, freedom brought with it the opportunity to create a yeomanry—an independent, landholding class of agriculturists who produced most of their own consumption needs and also produced commodities for sale. These were "reconstituted yeomen," whose ways of life combined elements from the African and American Indian past, as well as considerable European and Asian influences, in new cultural constellations.

177 Haitian country folk are a particularly good example of such a
231 historical process. The crops Haitian yeomen cultivate include the
241 maize, sweet potatoes, and manioc of the indigenous American Indian
412 (Taino) people, and other cultigens such as papaya and avocado which had been domesticated in mainland aboriginal America; and items like taro and mangoes from Oceania, sesame and sugarcane which originated in the Middle East and India, and vegetables from Europe. Their domestic animals, including cattle, swine, and fowls, are nearly all from the Old World. The chief agricultural tools—hoe, billhook, and dibble, which are well adapted to Haiti's shallow topsoil and hilly terrain—may be European or African in origin; the practice of burning off weeds before planting may be African or American Indian. In the case of each trait—crop, tool, practice—one is confronted by the diverse and entangled culture history of the
177 Haitian people. What is true of agriculture is true of all else. The re-
771 ligion of Haiti is at once two religions rather than one: Catholicism
19 *and* vodoun. Yet these two belief systems form a single ideology for most Haitians, particularly in the rural areas and among those of the urban lower classes. The Creole language is similarly complex in origin. While its lexicon is predominantly derived from French, parts of its syntax are not of Romance origin. For instance, the use of postpositive nominalizing particles and the absence of gender typify Haitian Creole, and are decidedly not Romance in character. Terminology shows much the same; for example, animal names and anatomical terms are mainly French in origin, but some cooked foods carry names of African provenience.

177 The "mixing" of various elements of culture from different tradi-
174 tions is, of course, neither uniquely Caribbean nor uniquely Haitian. All cultures are growths out of the past, and change by losing and gaining traits and by combining and recombining their substance in

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several generations of ancestors, there can be little question of its high social position.

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Religion affords still another distinction between high and low. Haiti has a folk religion which American tourists call Voodoo (a name which makes them think immediately of superstitious emotionalism or some kind of occult balderdash), but which is more properly called Vodun. It is a true religion in that it answers for the native the questions arising in the world he knows, while giving him confidence to face the crises of life. Vodun is African in origin, Créole in its language, and homely in its creed and practice; none of these makes it any less a religion. The official religion of the country, on the other hand, is Roman Catholicism. Few members of the élite, however their hearts may yearn for the consoling securities of Vodun, dare openly either to acknowledge their "atavism" or to participate in the cult. They must be Catholics or agnostics. It is often remarked that below the surface many a professing Catholic aristocrat cherishes Vodun beliefs; the important fact is that he keeps his folk worship secret. Because the outside world ridicules Vodun as superstition, and because the approved Catholic Church fights it, government restrictions effectively keep its ritual out of the public gaze. All the discriminatory laws, however, have not weakened its hold upon the masses. It is because Vodun is a *folk* religion that the élite cannot permit themselves to adhere to it openly.

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The final and most complicated distinction between the two castes is skin color. Any generalization on this matter is open to numerous exceptions; moreover, the whole question of color in Haiti touches the most sensitive nerves of the upper classes. One must begin by such casual observations as these: the vast majority of the lower orders are definitely dark or even black; the lighter the skin, the more likely a person is to belong to the élite. It is true that there are black aristocrats, and it is equally true that numbers of peasants have light complexions. At almost any function in high society, however, the proportion of dark-skinned persons is decidedly small. Among the youth, the tendency is always to select a spouse whose skin color is light; marriages are often made between aristocrats and white foreigners resident in Haiti, so that the children may lighten the family complexion. While it is therefore inaccurate to assert that no full-blooded Negroes belong to the élite, it is also clear that lighter persons tend to have social advantages.

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565 rights of people of Negro blood. As a distinguished Haitian re-
484 marked, "It is from France that we draw our culture, our language,
177 our literature, our attitudes of mind: why should we not love her?"
186 The more time the élite spend in France, the less kinship they feel with the masses. There is not necessarily any conscious snobbery in this increasing discrepancy; it simply results from a life spent in entirely different environments. The Boston Brahmin, for example, may be kindhearted and yet feel little kinship with a Mississippi share-cropper.

564 Inside the castes one may find social distinctions familiar in democracies. There are well-to-do élite who set the standards of manners and entertainment, and there are peasant landholders who through force of personality dominate their rural neighborhoods. The intellectual man of the upper classes stands somewhat apart from the social whirl of "high society." An important government official has more prestige among the leisured classes than a small businessman, just as a powerful religious adept is more honored among the peasants than a happy-go-lucky ragamuffin. It is obvious, however, that within the élite caste social discrimination occurs more frequently and is more accurately observed than among the country people.

[184] Such phrases as "Haitian religion" or "Haitian public opinion"
[77] are accurate only in so far as the person who uses them defines the
[208] adjective "Haitian." One might describe truly a phenomenon characteristic of ninety-five out of a hundred Haitians and yet, in the opinion of those who dominate the economic, political, and social life, do injustice to Haiti.

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INTRODUCTION

IF the visitor to Haiti is first struck by the wide separation between the élite and the peasant masses, the person who knows Haiti only through books is sure to think of it as a country of Voodoo. There is no error of fact here, for Voodoo is characteristic of Haiti. Nevertheless, what the American conjures up in his mind when he uses the word is almost certain to be misleading. In spite of detailed reports of anthropologists the average American clings firmly to his notion that Voodoo is Negro superstition chiefly concerned with charms or spells to "hoodoo" (a variation of the same word) an enemy. Scientists rarely succeed in correcting long-held but incorrect or one-sided impressions of the meaning of terms; they end rather by inventing a new word, or else continue the generally losing fight for precise usage, and so preserve the confusion.[1]

Since there is small likelihood of eradicating the inexact connotations of "Voodoo," many recent anthropologists have adopted such spellings as Vodun, Vodou, Vodoun, Vaudou, and Vodûn, all renditions of local pronunciation of the same term. *Vodun* (pronounced Vo-doon) has been chosen for use in this work, in the hope that readers will bear in mind that the folk religion is not mere idle superstition. A grasp of the real and distinctive religious beliefs and cult practices of the Haitian is very necessary to an understanding of the social picture.

Like its caste system, the religious life of Haiti presents far-reaching contrasts. The only approved religion of the country is Roman Catholicism. To this faith all the élite who are religiously inclined, or wish to pay formal homage to the institution of religion, belong. No Protestant sect has ever gained a real foothold in Haiti. Catholic churches are among the imposing edifices in every town; Catholic priests are an everyday sight as they go about their parishes; Catholic brothers and sisters, with state support and approval, direct much of the higher education in the country.

1. Witness in anthropology the contrast between the popular and the scholarly meaning of *culture*, *race*, *taboo*, and *fetish*; in chemistry of *reaction* (as when a man is asked his "reaction" to an opinion); in psychology of *instinct*, *innate*, and *inherent*; and in sociology of *caste*, *institution*, and *social*.

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Paralleling the accepted form and existing at the same time, is the Vodun religion. To this faith practically every member of the lower caste adheres; but no casual visitor ever sees a Vodun "temple," or would recognize one if he saw it. Vodun "priests" likewise have no characteristic dress to set them apart from their barefoot country neighbors. The state gives absolutely no support to this folk religion, which has no seminaries, no orders, no publishing house, nor even any orthodoxy. One is not a member of the Vodun religion or church; rather one believes and practices Vodun.

The paradox of the religious situation in Haiti lies in the fact that although the masses are Vodun worshipers, most of them are likewise Catholics; that although the élite formally disapprove of Vodun, many of them are profoundly interested in it; that although the state supports the Catholic Church and officially frowns on Vodun, it does not, cannot, and apparently would not if it could, suppress it altogether. The result of these contradictions is a strange intermixture of creed and ritual, mental struggles among certain of the élite, supersensitiveness to foreign opinion in connection with "Voodoo," and a clandestine air which adds to the mystery most strangers are determined to find in Vodun.

An understanding of these religious ambiguities must depend to some degree upon a knowledge of Haitian history, for both Catholicism and Vodun have colonial origins, together with local peculiarities and historical developments, which make them characteristically Haitian.

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VI

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

1. *French Colonial Backgrounds*

WHEN France was first establishing a foothold in the New World, religion was one of the consuming passions of the French people. Priests accompanied early explorers, missionaries consecrated their lives to conversion of the Indians; monks, nuns, and parish priests were a vital part of the pioneer settlements of New France. Every family in the mother country hoped that at least one of its sons would devote himself to the service of the Church. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were, par excellence, missionary centuries.

By the time the colony of Saint-Domingue was acquired, however, this religious zeal was on the wane, and just when the colony was becoming prosperous and populous France was entering the phase of her history known as The Enlightenment. Although the growth of the colony is impressive from many points of view, religion is not one of them, for planters intent upon money-making and luxurious living in an exploitative tropical colony gave little energy to spiritual development.[1] The Roman Catholic Church, being the official church of France, was naturally the only important religious organization of the colony; the congregations authorized to send clergy to Saint-Domingue—Carmelites, Capuchins, Dominicans, and Jesuits—divided the territory and work between them.

No doubt the fathers did some assiduous work. Official historians of the Roman Church in Haiti give the definite impression that their task was arduous and not very rewarding.[2] The torrid heat, diseases (especially yellow fever), the long distances and poor means of transportation were discouraging enough; until the middle of the eighteenth century there was the added difficulty of the poor human

1. It is revealing to see what characteristics of the culture of their mother country colonists bring with them to a new region. French Canadians, in contrast to French colonists in Saint-Domingue, kept many more customs of old France. See J. G. Leyburn, *Frontier Folkways* (New Haven, 1935), pp. 54–57.

2. A good account of the inertia of religious life in colonial Saint-Domingue is given in P. A. Cabon, *Notes sur l'histoire religieuse d'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, 1933), chap. I.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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175 material—Frenchmen who lived "in a deplorable state of morals,
• 111 too often recalling those of the freebooters and buccaneers" who were their ancestors and predecessors. Even when the calibre of the colonists improved, religion was a minor concern, business and pleasure pushing it well into the background.

There was no great antagonism toward the fathers; indeed, not enough attention was paid to the priests and their work to warrant any very strong feeling. It was indifference and insolence the fathers had to face, or, if they showed too great an interest in the welfare of slaves upon a plantation, suspicion and peremptory curbs. By the old
[671] Code Noir under which the colony theoretically operated, masters were obligated to send their slaves to Mass on Sundays and feast days under penalty of heavy fines; the Code likewise prescribed the baptism of all blacks and their instruction in the Catholic faith. But just as the colonists ignored all parts of the Code antagonistic to their own economic interests, so specifically did they disregard the sections dealing with their religious obligations.

175 Some priests were in any case not too zealous. It was much more
793 agreeable to attend only to external forms, and so participate in the charming life of high society, than to stand firm against laxity. If a
662 priest showed enthusiasm for his duties to his African charges he was
567 almost certain to be accused by the planters of stirring up the slaves
[792] and undermining the foundations of colonial society. This was, in fact, the very accusation leveled at the Jesuits to bring about their expulsion from the colony in 1764. The example was not lost upon other priests.

175 "The safety of the whites demands that the Negroes be kept in
771 profound ignorance," said one of the later governors in a message to France. This sentiment, perfectly expressing the conviction of the
563 majority of planters, not only prevented any secular education of the blacks, but actually kept many of them from instruction in catechism, creed, or any part of the Catholic faith. If instruction is forbidden, few of the sacraments can be administered, for how can a person be confirmed, confess, do penance, if he know not even the first principles of the faith? Few masters objected to the baptism of slave children; on the other hand, they roundly disapproved of the sacrament of marriage for their blacks, since this might place an obstacle in the way of slave sales, and even open the way for assimilation of blacks and whites in the colony.

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Granted these obvious difficulties, there is still little to be said for the zeal or integrity of churchmen in Saint-Domingue. Father Cabon cites a report to Rome in 1794, which, he remarks, "was not designed to be made public, and does not bear the earmarks of passion," and which flatly states that "since the expulsion of the Jesuits, the curés have for the most part led lives so indecent . . . that the citizens and Negroes have lost all the sentiments of religion which the Jesuits gave them."[3] There had been distinguished churchmen in Saint-Domingue before 1750, authors, scientists, teachers of some note, but none appeared thereafter. The rich French colony was not a bright star in the Catholic crown.

Undeterred by those who might have been their spiritual guides, the white people followed the easy path of self-indulgence. The universal testimony of visitors is that, with a few notable exceptions, immorality and cruelty were daily commonplaces. To make a fortune was the prime ambition of every white man, since money made possible the luxurious enjoyment of this world's goods. Protest against money-making or soft living would have been futile. Administrative agents turned public office to their own profit; judges sold justice to the highest bidder; planters drove their slaves to death; and priests dispensed religious solace for a tidy sum.

The freedmen, who in everything patterned their lives after social leaders in the white planter class, had no more concern for religion than their models. They attended Mass occasionally as a social event, where they might see and be seen. When in the latter days of the colony discriminatory legislation required that colored persons sit in separate parts of the church, most of the affranchis simply refrained from attending Mass: their religious zeal was not so great as to make them submit to the public shame of segregation. In their daily lives, likewise, they followed the example of the white planters in pursuing pleasure rather than sobriety, "culture" rather than religious zeal. Like the whites, they were often licentious in their conduct. When it came their turn to direct affairs of state in free Haiti, there was little interest in spiritual matters among them. The intellectuals of the group paid homage to the liberal philosophers of the century rather than to religious thinkers.

If religion was at a low ebb in the prosperous days of the colony, it almost disappeared in the excitement of the years following the

3. Ibid., p. 33. revolt of the slaves (1791).

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revolt of the slaves (1791). Priests fled or went into hiding with the other whites, so that Masses lapsed or were said by religious but unordained mulattoes. Upon his accession to power in Haiti Toussaint L'Ouverture made several attempts to rehabilitate religion in the country, for the Church he felt was a stable institution which might help in giving order to the turbulent land. He tried to accomplish the return of priests to the island parishes and churches. There are indications that Toussaint was not himself deeply religious; his pronouncements are formal, but one cannot say that they appear to be deeply felt. In his proclamation of October 10, 1798, announcing the expulsion of the English, he orders thanks to the God of Hosts, recommends to his chiefs of corps that the soldiers pray morning and evening and faithfully attend Mass on Sundays. In a public address he enjoins upon parents the duty of teaching the catechism to their children.

The use of Catholicism as an aid to statecraft is apparent in his official dealings with the Church. His constitution of May 9, 1801, states that "the Catholic religion, apostolic and Roman, is the sole religion publicly professed." To obtain priests he besought the return of many who had fled the slave insurrection; he likewise turned to France, but France at this time was less than ardent in religion; nor were French priests likely to wish to come to an island ruled by blacks, particularly one which Napoleon was quite obviously planning to subdue. Toussaint addressed himself, therefore, to a schismatic abbé, Grégoire by name, in whom he saw a friend. Whether Grégoire might have helped him to establish the Catholic Church firmly as a part of Haitian life, with only a handful of repatriated colonial priests, we cannot know, for in 1802 the final war of independence began and the island, in convulsion, had no time for spiritual matters.

2. *Catholicism in Independent Haiti*

Dessalines, the passionate, violent, and licentious founder of the new state, although not an enemy of the Church was not its active friend. In his slaughter of whites he spared several priests who had come to the country under Toussaint's persuasion, either because these clerics were obviously inoffensive or might later prove useful to him. Just as he controlled every other detail of Haitian life, he was determined to direct church affairs. He reserved to himself the right to fix the limits of jurisdiction of each priest and to nominate, even

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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to appoint, curés to the vacant parishes. His independence of action could not fail to give offense to Church authorities. One of his first appointees was a black ex-slave, Félix, who had been a drum major in the native army. Félix was made curé in the important town of Saint-Marc.

The constitution of his empire (May, 1805) indicates that Dessalines did not intend to make himself head of the Church, but rather planned a complete separation of Church and State. Article 50 reads: "The law admits no dominant religion"; while the next article grants freedom to all cults and refuses state support to any denomination or minister. No attack was made, therefore, upon Catholicism, yet the disestablishment of that Church was a serious blow to its prestige. Not in the specific provisions regarding religion was the Church most weakened, but rather in the "liberality" of articles dealing with actions upon which the Church had taken a firm moral stand. Thus Article 14 declared that "marriage is an act purely civil and authorized by the government," while Article 15 permits divorce by the state. Early laws of the empire still further undermined the position of Church doctrine. Illegitimate children were granted the same legal rights as legitimate ones—a generous provision which removed one of the strong reasons for marriage; separation of husband and wife except by divorce was forbidden, and this prohibition practically encouraged the divorce disapproved by the Church; finally, the grounds upon which divorce might be allowed were broader than those existing anywhere else in the Western World at the time: mutual consent, application from one party to the marriage, or simple allegation of incompatibility of temperament or character.

From the promulgation of this constitution in 1805 and for the next fifty-five years, Haiti was in open schism from the Roman Catholic Church. The Holy See refused to recognize either the Haitian state or the provisions of its constitution, and it declined to allow priests to enter the country. Certain Haitian presidents were friendly enough to Catholicism, and others were openly desirous of reëstablishing a state religion, but the breach once made was not healed by mere good wishes. The longer the schism endured, the farther the people grew away from the doctrines and practices of a religion in which they had never been firmly grounded. At the moment of independence, when all minds were more open to new

3: .Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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ideas than in later years, the habits of regular attention to religious duties might have been fixed; by 1860 it was too late. Religion existed during those years, but it was a strange gallimaufry of Catholicism and folk belief.

On the whole, the rulers of young Haiti were tolerant of the Catholic Church even to the point of advancing its interests, in so far as these might benefit the state. Their pronouncements and actions, nevertheless, were not those of ardent personal believers. Pétion's constitution of the republic in 1806 once more established Catholicism as the official Church. What it gave with one hand, however, it took away with the other. Thus:

Art. 35. The Catholic, apostolic, and Roman religion being that of all Haitians, is the religion of the state. It and its ministers will be protected.

Art. 36. The law assigns to each minister of that religion the extent of his spiritual administration. These ministers may not, under any pretext, form a body within the state.

Art. 37. If in the course of time other religions are introduced, no person shall be hindered, so long as he conforms to the laws, in following the cult he has chosen.

The Catholic, then, is the state religion, but only because the Haitians have heretofore been nominal Catholics. It occupies a position of practical fact which it would lose if by the introduction of other cults Haitians should be drawn away from it. Its ministers will be carefully watched to see that they do not, as a group, try to exert political pressure. And what freedom of action is possible to a church whose ecclesiastical parishes can be limited or extended in size by the civil legislature?

Pétion no more fought religion than he fought any other conventional institution approved by civilized people; but he did little to foster it. He received certain Wesleyan missionaries with considerable hospitality, remarking that "education increases the dignity of mankind." He appeased the good Catholics by repealing the law concerning the rights of illegitimate children, substituting for it a more moderate French rule.[4] Likewise, he invited the Catholic Church to participate in the education of Haitian youth.

4. The French practice allowed an illegitimate child recognized before a wedding equal rights of inheritance with legitimate offspring, while giving only quarter rights to a child recognized after marriage.

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Organized

religion was never at a lower ebb in Haiti than toward the middle of the nineteenth century, as whole generations of citizens were growing up who had never known the proper forms of ritual, and had no real religious training. The outward shell of the Church covered steadily more "superstition," more homely beliefs and practices, and the long divorce from Rome permitted the growth of a native religion which later could not be eradicated, no matter how assiduous the labors of Catholic priests.

During Boyer's quarter-century the once Roman and Catholic Church remained the official religion of the state, but its head was now the President. Organization simplified as orthodoxy declined. By 1840 there was only one order of priesthood; no archbishop, bishops, canons, curés, or other titled dignitaries, but only "priests." The people were not taxed to maintain the state Church; there were no tithes or forced contributions for the support of public worship or the repair of parish churches, no heavy list of clergy living from levies on the people. However, if the Haitians were not burdened by imposed religious fees, they were still through their own fears subject to steady tolls for services by the degraded men who then called themselves priests.

Every effort of the state failing to provide proper religious leadership, Boyer resigned himself to permitting those who professed to be priests to practice in the republic. There were seventy so-called priests in the country in 1840. Some of them had once been in holy orders but were now unfrocked: they found in Haiti not only a haven but a fertile field for gain. In addition to these religious renegades came adventurers who knew just enough of ritual and theology to use the priestly garb as a cover for easy graft. Both groups encouraged crude superstition with a view to making money. They baptized houses, boats, and doorposts, and blessed fetish charms or amulets, all for a fee. Immorality was flagrant, and many of the "priests" had mistresses and children. The debauchery of some was so notorious that Secretary-General Inginac had publicly to rebuke them and even to banish a few from the country. A visiting Quaker, benignantly tolerant of most of what he saw in Haiti, was scandalized by the religious situation. He said that the sole aim of most of the clergy was to secure gold and silver "as quickly as they can, to send to Europe for investment." Excepting a very few (notably the priests at Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haïtien, and Jacmel), he

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175 793 795 [114] concludes: "With regard to the ecclesiastical institutions of the republic we may safely say . . . that if the standing army be one cause of the degradation of the people, the Church is surely another; and the sooner it can be reformed, the better for religion, for morals, and for the physical well-being of the community."[9]

175 793 795 691 Eventually the state felt it necessary to protect the people from these predatory priests. True, people paid for what they considered to be services performed, but the legislators could not permit unlimited graft in the name of religion. An act of 1840,[10] therefore, set a fee of half a dollar for each baptism;[11] $8 for a marriage with Mass, $4 for one without a Mass; an ordinary Mass, 37 cents; a High Mass, service, or funeral "of the first class" (that is, with choir, sacristan, acolytes, and churchwarden), $60; funerals of the second class, $20; funerals of the third class, $10. Articles of the act specify what shall constitute the three classes of service, and it is then stated, "Neither rectors nor vicars shall receive anything for offices at which they do not assist in person, except in cases of illness." The Haitians were not receiving true religious instruction, but at least their government tried to prevent their being mulcted by the spurious churchmen.

175 771 184 Since Haiti had no schools except the few attended by children of the elite, religious instruction of youth was almost nonexistent. The average elite man was openly an unbeliever, for it required little acumen to show him that if the priests represented religion there was nothing to commend it. Hunt in 1860 said: "Many of the educated are about where the French were when they left the island. They believe in Voltaire, whom I have not unfrequently heard them characterize as the greatest man who ever lived."[12] In contrast to the men, the women made more of a show of being devout and attentive to the formal duties of religion, but according to Franklin they

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are not actuated by any religious feeling. Going to church is a mere matter of parade with them, the sabbath being a day of festivities, and not set aside for religious devotion. The female congregations which frequent the churches in Hayti appear better prepared for an opera, or some other public amusement, than for the sacred duties of offering up their prayers in adoration of the Deity.

9. John Candler, *Brief Notices of Hayti*, pp. 98 ff.
10. Chap. [illegible], articles 28–31.
11. The figures cited in the Act are in gourdes.
12. Benjamin S. Hunt, *Remarks on Hayti as a Place of Settlement for Afro-Americans* (Philadelphia, 1860), p. 18.

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The men seldom or never go to mass, except on the days particularly set apart by the government as public fêtes. On these occasions the president and all the officers of Hayti go in procession, but the idea of devotion, I believe, never enters their contemplation. Such days are merely set aside for celebrating some particular event, which it is wished should be handed down to posterity. These occasions present only the external symbol of religion, the whole people being either ignorant or careless of its real character. Their manner and appearance during the celebration of the mass shew that they have no inward feelings of piety or devotion.[13]

Catholicism in Haiti, then, had fallen on evil days; Protestantism, on the other hand, was unable to gain any foothold. Boyer, indifferent to all religion, did not even care to tolerate Wesleyan missionaries as Pétion had done, for when certain of them arrived and were met with "persecution and stoning by a mob," it required persuasion to gain his assent to freeing those the police had taken into custody. He forbade any further meetings of Wesleyans, on the ground that they stirred up riots. At the close of Boyer's administration it was estimated that there were only about 1,200 Protestants in the country, mostly Methodists and Baptists, and these primarily Negroes who had come from the United States to settle in the republic.

Although the Haitian government probably derived a certain satisfaction from controlling a state Church, Boyer was impelled both by circumstance and his own temperament to obtain the approval of the Holy See. His own tepid spiritual zeal had nothing to do with the case; Haitian public order would benefit by a superior group of priests, and Haitian prestige would rise, he thought, with recognition by Rome. Having already in 1826 settled the conflict between France and Haiti in the political sphere, Boyer tried assiduously to end the schism from Rome. His propositions were examined with benevolence by the Pope, who conferred upon the primate of the Indies, archbishop of Santo Domingo, the title of archbishop of Haiti. This personage, however, was a Spaniard already established in the comfortable city of Santo Domingo amidst people of his own nationality. He could not be persuaded to move to Port-au-Prince. The failure of Boyer's efforts is due more to this ecclesiastic than to uncoöperativeness on the part of Rome. From 1834 to 1860 the Court of Rome had official representatives in Haiti, but they cannot have been very effective men, for conditions in

13. James Franklin, *The Present State of Hayti*, pp. 394–395.

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religious life were not improved and the schism endured. The archbishop of Haiti seemed to regard his new title as applying vaguely to the island, not the country, of Haiti, and since all his vicars were Spaniards unable to speak either French or the Créole dialect, they did nothing for religion in the Haitian republic.

Ties broken by a single radical action may require endless patience and persistence to knit together their severed threads. The imperiosity of Dessalines caused the rupture; it was prolonged by indifference to religion, absorption in economic and political matters, fear that France might use to her profit any *rapprochement* with Rome, and a certain complacency in subordinating Church to state. Inertia, however, was the real obstacle in the way of healing the breach. It is much less trouble to let conditions remain as they are than to make a change whose results no one can foretell. But the longer the rupture, the less understanding the people had of steps necessary to reëstablish the Church.

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When in 1847 Faustin Soulouque, the ignorant, became president, the horizon had never seemed darker for organized religion. The black general, suddenly impelled by a quirk of fortune into high office, was a man of the people in his religious attitudes. All their belief in magic, in the mystical power of certain rites, in charms and spells—all their "superstition" as the Catholics called it—Soulouque shared. For the first time in Haitian history one is aware that the folk beliefs brought over from Africa had become welded into a recognizable form, under the name of Vodun. To colonial writers "Vaudoux" had been primarily a name for certain dances; to the early Haitian élite it seems to have connoted either occult rites or vulgar claptrap compounded of gibberish, old wives' remedies, and sensual dances. But in the long and deepening twilight of Catholicism, the various elements were fused, until by Soulouque's time the Haitian was familiar with the general beliefs, rites, and "priesthood" of Vodun. As Soulouque had broken with the tradition of presidents who wished Haiti to be recognized as one of the community of civilized Western nations, so he allowed the traditional respect for Catholicism to die. As an emperor he was a transplanted African chief; as a believer he was a follower of Vodun. The rites were practiced and the sacrifices made openly now. Men in high places dared to reveal their belief in native tenets. For twelve years Vodun flourished with official approval.

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The depths to which Haiti descended under Soulouque made the task of his successor relatively simple. It would prove wise and generally popular to reverse the Emperor's action, in whatever respect. President Geffrard was the more successful as an antidote to the Emperor because of his practical intelligence. The best time to strike for the revival of Catholicism would be immediately after the heyday of Vodun. In 1859, the first year of his incumbency, Geffrard consequently undertook negotiations with the Holy See, sending two plenipotentiaries for the discussions. Because the Haitian delegates persuasively depicted the sorry state of religion in their country, because they showed themselves and their President willing to defer to papal wishes, and because the new Pope was filled with missionary zeal to reclaim Haiti for the Faith, all problems were overcome. An early agreement was reached, and the Concordat, signed in Rome on March 28, 1860, was approved by the Haitian Senate on the first of April. A commission was dispatched to Haiti immediately, one which did thoroughly and well its task of delimiting the boundaries of dioceses, allocating bishops and other clergy, and founding a seminary. An archbishop of Port-au-Prince was consecrated, and the Catholic Church, Roman and apostolic, at long last became officially established once more in the republic. The breach of fifty-five years was healed.

In one sense the reform had come too late. All the peasants were by this time thoroughly imbued with the ideas of Vodun, as were the lower orders in the towns. Most of the élite either clandestinely practiced Vodun or ignored religion altogether. On the other hand, practically no Haitian was opposed to Catholicism, not even the most ardent devotee of the obscurer cult. The native faith had grown up quietly enough, making its adjustments to the outward forms of Catholicism which still existed in the country. To every Vodun worshiper there were simply two hierarchies of spiritual beings, each with its own powers; to believe in one was not to deny the other. The new Catholic priests, then, met no hostility; what they had to deal with was an ineradicable folk religion which accepted everything and rejected little in the spiritual realm.

The Archbishop, his band of forty priests, and a small group of Brothers and Sisters set to work with fervor. Nearly everything had to be rebuilt from the ground. Church buildings were in such disrepair that it was considered more economical to erect new ones than

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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Any casual attempt to assess the importance of religion

lives of the people is sure to prove erroneous, for in no phase of life are outward appearances so deceptive. What the unsophisticated peasant believes can be ascertained on the whole more accurately than the beliefs of the intelligent élite. To the foreign observer, Roman Catholicism seems to play as large and as small a part in the thinking of the Haitian upper classes as among members of upper-class French society. Outwardly, the élite are professing Catholics or not religious at all. It is considered proper to attend Mass and otherwise to pay respect to religious forms; actually one loses nothing in prestige if he is not a practicing Christian. Society seems to exert no pressure in the matter. Only if a member of the upper class fears for the security of his social position, or knows that rumors are afloat of his addiction to Vodun, does he feel impelled to become assiduous in his open attentions to the Church.

The national sensitiveness to skin color is apparent in the priestly complexions. Since the old tradition lingers that "baptism by a black will not stick," not even the peasants welcome native Catholic priests. The God and saints of Christianity need the intercession of white men, just as the Vodun spirits need that of natives. In the early days peasants stoned Negro priests who tried to administer the Catholic sacraments. Such an attitude toward a black clergy falls in well with the preferences of the élite. If there were Haitian priests, they would probably be drawn from the élite class since this is the educated group; but it might happen that some devout peasant would rise to the priesthood and so have the care of a parish including élite—a contingency unthinkable to the aristocrat. Snobbishness, indeed, affects the usefulness of the town priests, for the élite members of the congregation insist on having sermons in French, a language which only the small minority understand, rather than in the Créole which is the speech of everyone, intelligible to gentry and humble alike. The Mass is consequently celebrated for the people at large in unknown tongues, Latin for the ritual, French for the sermon; the benefit they derive from it must be wholly from their inner communion stimulated by the actions of the service. The town priests are often willing enough to accede to élite pressure in the matter of language, for they know French as their mother tongue and would have to learn Créole; although some of the more devoted priests become adepts in native speech, using it in their personal

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VII

VODUN

1. *Misconceptions*

THE second religion of Haiti is Vodun. It is not mentioned by officials as one of the spiritual assets of the country; its priests wear no regular habit; it has no town churches. Yet it is the living religion of the masses. Catholicism may have official and social sanction; indeed, most peasants do consider themselves as belonging to that faith, yet it is doubtful whether in any other Western country there is so universal an adherence to a common religion as in Haiti to Vodun.

If there had been a paid campaign of propagandist misinformation, it is unlikely that more untruths and half-truths could have been put into circulation about this faith of the Haitian people. Moreau de Saint-Méry describes something of it in his classic work on colonial matters, although most of what he tells concerns the dances, which he considered primarily a form of recreation. Pious visitors to Haiti in the early years of independence labeled it simply as a form of superstition and did not bother either to understand or misrepresent it. By the time of Soulouque it was known as a rather definite folk religion, but only after 1863 did what was really a simple set of religious beliefs and practices suddenly become notorious, making Haiti the object of macabre curiosity and of reports whose chief characteristic was gruesomeness.

In 1863 occurred the *Affaire de Bizoton*, and it may as well be recounted forthwith as the prime origin of all misunderstanding which has pursued Haitian religion—although to emphasize it is like giving an account of Christianity with all the emphasis on witch burnings, torture of heretics, and excesses of bigotry.

On December 27, 1863, a little girl of Bizoton named Claircine disappeared from home during the absence of her mother. Search for her was futile until after several days it was discovered that she had been killed and used as part of a sinister sacrifice by religious fanatics. An inquest, discreetly managed, resulted in the arrest of fifteen people, of whom eight were longer detained. The trial of

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175 these four men and four women began on February 4, 1864, arousing
• 771 all Port-au-Prince, the local population as well as the foreign lega-
[682] tions and consulates. The guilt of the accused was soon evident; following their complete confessions they were declared guilty of sorcery, cruelty, and murder, and all eight were condemned to death. They were executed on February 13, only six weeks after the crime. What these fanatics had done seemed as horrible to the Haitians as a similar crime would seem to Americans.

Much publicity was given the trial by foreign journalists who, with their flair for making the most of a dramatic tale, added whatever they could pick up by hearsay of the beliefs which had prompted the human sacrifice. The reading public, uncritical and uninformed about Haiti itself, if they gave the lurid accounts a second thought seem to have assumed that such actions were "what one might expect of Negroes." The incident would shortly have passed into that oblivion which awaits sensational news from obscure parts of the world, if it had not been kept alive by the British Minister, who was also an author.

114 In the 'eighties, after retirement from diplomatic service, Sir
971 Spenser St. John wrote a two-volume work called *Hayti, or The Black Republic*. It was probably no more egregious in its dramatic account than were scores of other books by Englishmen who, in the latter years of the Victorian era, were discovering darkest Africa, holding dominion over palm and pine, and taking up the white man's burden all over the "heathen" world; but it possessed the literary qualities which made people buy it and discuss with avidity its horrendous details. The adjective "black" in its title seemed almost to refer to the moral characteristics of the people rather than to their skin color. Sir Spenser made a great many accurate, if somewhat one-sided, observations on the customs of the people, giving the public the first readable book in decades about the Haitians. The grisly climax of his story, however, is the *Affaire de Bizoton*. He amassed an astonishing collection of tales, practically all at second-hand, to prove that Vodun (Voodooism, he called it) was the real religion of the Haitians (which it was), and that it was compounded of the vilest superstitions and most fiendish practices, of which the most essential was human sacrifice of "the goat without horns" followed by a cannibalistic communion. Which, needless to say, it was not.

This is the sort of dramatic tale uncritical readers seem to like to

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believe. It stuck in people's minds. Since Sir Spenser's time tourists to Haiti have habitually spent a few hours ashore, heard drumbeats from the hills, and shuddered deliciously as they conjured up images of weird goings-on—black magic, licentious dances, and frenetic orgies. Novelists during the past half-century have spun their tales full of local color, while "serious" authors have made small fortunes out of pseudo-scientific books with just enough fact mingled with their lush imaginings to give "an air of similitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." Their language runs into such purple phrases as "blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened,"[1] to describe the religious exaltation of the people at a Vodun service. Under this constant rain of misrepresentation, Haitians who care for the good opinion of other nations have become extremely sensitive on the subject of the folk religion. Many of them deny its existence; others speak of it as something beneath their attention. The more they try to cover it over, however, with silence and professed contempt, the more mysteriously fascinating it becomes to the foreign visitor. The tourist who goes to Paris expects to see the Eiffel Tower, whatever its aesthetic faults; the tourist in Haiti wishes to see, without quite knowing what he means by the term, "a Voodoo dance." No amount of scientific writing about the real character of Vodun will change the popular misconception. For every reader of accurate ethnographical or anthropological treatises on Vodun[2] there are hundreds who feast morbidly on sensational books.

Haitian Vodun is not the same as the hoodoo of American Negroes.[3] The word is etymologically the same, whether American Voodoo, Haitian Vodun, French Vaudoux, or Spanish judu (whence our "hoodoo"): all derive from a Dahomean (West African) word signifying "god" or "spirit."[4] It is the generic term for all deities.

1. This phrase is taken from W. B. Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York, 1929), p. 42, but might easily have come from half a dozen other journalistic descriptions.

2. Particularly recommended are Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York, 1937), and Dr. Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (Port-au-Prince, 1928).

3. See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 ff.

4. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in a surprisingly superficial and brief article, gives a singular etymology to "Voodoo," tracing it to the Swiss canton of Vaud, where in the Middle Ages a heterodox faith sprang up which had to be practiced in secret. The implication is that any secret religion might be called "Vaud-ois," or "Voodoo." Evidently the author of the encyclopaedia article had made no serious investigation of the subject; most modern dictionaries, on the other hand, indicate the Dahomean etymology.

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This was recognized in colonial times by Moreau de Saint-Méry, who wrote: "According to the Arada Negroes, the real followers of *Vaudoux* in the colony, . . . *Vaudoux* signifies an all-powerful and supernatural being on whom depend all the events which come to pass on this earth."[5]

Vodun is a true religion, in the same sense that Mohammedanism, Buddhism, or Christianity are all true religions. That is to say, it is a set of beliefs and practices which claim to deal with the spiritual forces of the universe, and attempt to keep the individual in harmonious relation with them as they affect his life. The word "superstition" is relative. It is a subjective term, being generally applied to beliefs which we consider ourselves too wise, too advanced, to cling to. The sophisticated skeptic calls the belief in miracles superstition; the Christian regards the reverence for certain animals in India superstition: it is all a matter of view. Using the greatest number of criteria available for the definition of religion as distinct from vague superstition, religion may be said to be a set of beliefs about spirits or gods and their nature, about the origin of the world, about good and evil, about man's relation to the universe he knows; it includes a set of practices of worship; it is an attempt to ward off misfortune and to get good; it treats of what happens after death; it is a system of seeking security, solace, and support in the face of a supposed supernatural.[6]

Vodun is all of these.

Like any other vital religion which has spread from its original centre, endured through the years, and come into contact with other faiths, Vodun is not at the present what it was in its early days. Like others it has unconsciously borrowed—and in borrowing, transformed—ideas, concepts, practices, rites.[7] The greatest single influence exerted upon it has been that of the Roman Catholic Church with which the people have had continuous dealings, increasing in recent years, for more than a century and a half. Many aspects of

5. In his *Description . . . de la partie française de . . . Saint-Domingue*, I, 46.

6. This alliterative phrase was suggested as a partial definition of religion by Prof. Raymond Kennedy.

7. It need hardly be pointed out that Christianity is no longer the simple faith taught by Jesus, but a composite of that faith with scholarly theology, absorbed local practices, mysteries which flourished in the Roman Empire, secular philosophy—and, to put it briefly, the accretions of changing time. Similarly, Buddhism is more than the doctrines of Gautama, and Mohammedanism more (and less) than Mohammed taught.

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Vodun, therefore, show the Catholic influence, exerted in the main unconsciously.

Unlike the great religions, Vodun lacks a formal theology. As has been said, no seminary exists for the training of priests and priestesses, no congress or college of fathers states or amends the creed; there is no church court to discipline the individual enthusiast, or catechism for the young; no scriptures or sermons are printed or read to strengthen the faith. Vodun is an informal religion of action, not a formal one of reason. It flourishes because it is malleable, adaptive, suited to the needs of a people living close to nature and without education. To give a single lucid description of this Haitian folk religion, created as it is by everybody and by nobody, is about as possible as to give one description of home life, which varies according to the couple. We may, however, outline the common elements of creed and practice.

2. *Formative Days*

To say casually that Vodun is African in origin is to say little more than that it does not stem from the great world religions. There is no unity in Africa today; there was still less in the eighteenth century when slaves were being imported into Haiti. At that period it was possible to find a new dialect and a different set of folkways every few miles along the western seacoast. Two slaves from one geographical region (the Gold Coast, for example) might not understand each other or have the slightest predisposition to sympathize with each other's customs.

Colonial planters experimented with slaves from various regions in Africa, just as they might compare breeds of horses; setting tractability off against originality, brute strength against skill, intelligence against health. In this quest for a perfect slave, Negroes were imported from all parts of the Dark Continent, from Senegal in the northwest around the five thousand miles of seacoast to Mozambique and Madagascar in the east. Partly because trading conditions were more favorable in the Dahomey and Congo regions, and partly because the qualities of Dahomean and Congolese were preferred, Negroes from these two sections soon came to predominate over others in the colony. Whereas "Congo" was merely a geographical term, implying no community of feeling among the natives living

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175 567 along that river, Dahomey was the name of a powerful kingdom under a political administration which embraced a fair amount of interchange of ideas and similarity of social institutions, including religion.

175 567 178 Discretion made the planters separate slaves who knew each other, in order to minimize opportunities for revolt among them. This policy, although it prevented the rapid growth of "slave" customs, at the same time dispersed Dahomeans all over the colony; beliefs and practices held in common among the slaves were likely to take on a Dahomean cast. Since their work was directed, their freedom of movement limited, and their family life broken up, there was practically no opportunity for the outcropping of *any* African ideas relating to economic life, government, property, education, or 175 marriage. The one sphere in which it was possible for Old World 178 beliefs to continue was the religious. No slave dealer could penetrate 796 the minds of his workers or silence their folk tales and folk songs in 771 the evening when work was done; even the strictest plantation 535 owners allowed dances in the slave quarters on Saturday nights and Sunday. It is the dance, a vital part of Dahomean religion, which seems to have formed the nucleus around which the diverse beliefs of African tribesmen grouped themselves, for it was a form of action which need not involve anything more than amusement or emotional release, if the participant were not religiously inclined. In the beginning, as Goethe observes, was the Act. To this simple Act of dancing, the Word, with thought behind it, could easily be added later. Practically all African tribesmen danced; and the numerous Dahomeans had a dance which was ostensibly for diversion but could be turned to a religious purpose as well.

771 171 174 Here, then, was the skeleton of a slave religion. Although every single African tribe had its own beliefs and ritual, each (so far as we know) had common elements with every other one. For example, all slaves, whether Senegalese or Angolese, believed in a multiplicity of spiritual beings, some of whom controlled the aspects of nature—lightning and storms, the sea, the sky. They thought that disease and other ill fortune came from spirits who must be placated in order to win back health and well-being. All felt that the normal course of events could be altered by magical spells, formulae, or charms; that one could bring misfortune to an enemy, luck to oneself, or ward off otherwise inevitable fate. Most of them had been accustomed to

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learn the properties of plants, both for healing and for poison. Except for the belief in spiritual beings, this folk knowledge would hardly have been classed as religious, for it was useful in every phase of daily life; the classification is that of the anthropologist, not of the simple black.

If Dahomean beliefs prevailed over others of African origin, it was chiefly because of the numerical preponderance of Dahomeans in the colony, together with the popularity of their religious dances. The Dahomean spirits or gods were Vodun; the dance in which the worshiper sought the inspiration of the spirits was a Vodun dance. Like all but the highly organized religions, this one recognized the validity of other beliefs. Its practitioners were not bigots. No hierarchy existed to keep out new accretions. Imperceptibly these were added to the original basic form: here an Arada spirit, there a Congolese prayer, and in many instances a Catholic saint, until the composite Vodun religion began to take shape.

There is no evidence that during colonial times Vodun was ever considered important by the white ruling class—certainly not as a faith. To most planters the word was the name for a vigorous dance. Judging from Moreau de Saint-Méry's description it was held openly enough, at times being witnessed by the whites as a sort of nocturnal diversion. Moreau knew, as did other whites, that there were "superstitious beliefs" connected with it, yet the offhand use of the word "superstition" was indication enough that the beliefs were not regarded as important. We have seen, however, what profitable use the slaves were able to make of the apparent innocence of their dances. When the idea of revolt began to germinate among them, gathering on each plantation at least once a week they had ample opportunity to hatch their plans. It is known that the campaign for revolt was developed partly under the stimulus of the Negro Boukman, a *houngan* or priest of Vodun. By means of drumbeats, which to the whites merely pounded out the rhythm for dancing but had for centuries been a means of communication at long distance in parts of West Africa, that ripening plot was telegraphed from one plantation to another. Even more important, perhaps, was the unity of feeling made possible, despite all incoherence of tradition and language, by the Vodun background.

The revolt of half a million slaves was a success. This fact has been rather too calmly accepted by historians of Saint-Domingue, who

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Vodun, then, was both widespread and powerful enough to be turned to most effective ends in 1791. Contemporary accounts of it still saw it as a meeting ground of superstitions. The French naturalist, Descourtilz, for example, was primarily struck by the use of the occult in connection with Vodun; he especially describes a woman who, under the seizure of her god, took a live coal in her hand without being burnt; a husband who by the use of magic struck his inconstant wife with a languorous malady, effective for half a year; and the knowledge of poison which was combined with the practice of magic. He mentions but one of the Vodun gods by name but implies the existence of many others.[10]

Madiou, Haiti's first historian, likewise always spoke of Vodun as a savage survival; he says of a native general, "Lamour Dérance, plunged in gross errors, put his faith in *sorcery*, in the prophecy of *papas*, or priests of *African fetishism*."[11] In his scornful distaste for the vulgar he clearly indicated by his own italics some conspicuous elements of the developing religion: magic, the use of fetishes, and a Vodun priesthood. His illustration of Dérance's error was his making soldiers believe that bullets could not wound them:

> When he marched to combat he was preceded by bands of Congos, Aradas, Ibos, Nabos, Mandingues, Haoussas, who threw themselves against the French battalions with a prodigious intrepidity, crying that the bullets were but dust. But this courage which *superstition* fed was shattered against the ramparts of . . . the Europeans' square formations.

It is noteworthy that the first three black rulers set themselves against Vodun because of its potentialities for sedition. The plots to overthrow the old régime had come to fruition at apparently innocent Vodun dances. Although the ingenuous aspect of the dance gathering had deceived the white masters, Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe knew the meaning of the assemblies. All three had to drive their people hard and knew that resentment would be an inevitable consequence; it must not have an opportunity to burgeon at nightly gatherings. Toussaint was the strictest of the three, for he forbade all dances and nocturnal assemblage.[12] The other two singled

10. M. E. Descourtilz, *Voyages d'un naturaliste en Haïti, 1799–1803* (Paris, 1935 ed.), pp. 116–118.
11. Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti*, III, p. 33.
12. In an order of January 4, 1800.

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The other two singled

out Vodun dances for their bans, permitting the purely social dances. On the eve of the first anniversary of independence, "as soon as retreat was sounded, African dances of all kinds began in the tents and open fields; the Vaudoux dance alone was proscribed; the noise of the drums did not quiet down until morning."[13] Dessalines was more suspicious of Vodun than the other two for, being a superstitious man himself, he feared that some of his growing number of enemies might use sorcery upon him; consequently whenever his active police reported meetings of Vodun worshipers he had the offenders shot if they could be caught. Practically all Haitians knew how to distinguish the rhythms of Vodun drumbeats from those of other dances, so that it was not particularly difficult to track down the meeting places. What Christophe really believed, no one could say. He paid outward homage to Roman Catholicism, of course, but rumor persisted of his great faith in magic and the power of African fetishes.[14]

The élite mulatto presidents, Pétion and Boyer, did not deign to dignify Vodun by prohibiting it. No revelation of their attitude toward it survives, but we may note that no law of their thirty-six-year tenure of the presidency mentions it. From their other opinions one concludes that they regarded it as merely another of the people's innocent and harmless aberrations. Not one of the foreigners whose curiosity about the Negro republic led them to report on Haitian life of this period gives an intelligent account of Vodun as it then was. Macaulay, writing in 1831, for example, describes the annual celebration at the source of Grande Rivière de l'Artibonite; he mentions the festive dances (not Vodun) and singing, then says: "Morning ceremonies consisted of a solemn sacrifice at which the blood of victims immolated for the feast were offered, and libations of wine were poured on the spring."[15] This was clearly a Vodun sacrifice. Brown, in 1837, writes as a religious man:

> No race is, more than the African, given to religious feelings, though these being but mere sensations entirely independent of thought and reason, manifest themselves in a display of idle fooleries, or dark and hideous terrors of the imagination. They intermix the legitimate ritual of the Catholic faith with the mysterious adoration paid to their national Fetiches, and the

13. Madiou, *op. cit.*, III, 186.
14. See Charles Mackenzie, *Notes on Hayti*, pp. 90–91.
15. Zachary Macaulay, *Haiti* (Paris, 1835), pp. 90–91.

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African obi and the Catholic priest both come in for a share of their respect and homage.[16]

This is the usual tone of the comment on native religion, as when Candler in 1842 speaks of funerals in country places "with the *rites of heathenism*, such as are practised to this day in the heart of Africa."[17] Of these conventional criticisms of Vodun, one of the more thoughtful is Bonneau's:

> The shocking phantasmagorias of fetishism paralyzed the intellectual development of the African race for six thousand years; superstition is in some sort inherent in its nature. The [Haitian] people need to break with their past. Catholicism has been prodigiously patient and courageous, but it does not possess the necessary corrective for extirpating the fetishism which immobilizes the black population. The Catholic Church, by fractioning the religious sentiment, by forcing thought to diffuse itself in order to take in a thousand secondary details, by imposing on the people practices without number which tend to materialize the cult, by placing as intermediaries between God and men a multitude of saints and genies, encourages and fortifies the tendencies, even the most deplorable ones, of the black race, whose intellect has been shrouded in mist for centuries precisely because it can grasp only with difficulty the relationships between things and ideas, tending rather to lose itself in details than to rise to general and synthetic conceptions.[18]

If the fixing of periods has any clarifying value, one might set the stages of the development of Vodun as follows:

1730–1790, its Emergence, when the importation of slaves was steadily increasing, with a gradual ascendancy of Dahomean ideas;

1790–1800, its practical Testing in the fires of revolt when, out of apparent innocence and enforced secrecy, Vodun effectively united the slaves in their action for freedom;

1800–1815, its Suppression under the black rulers;

1815–1850, its quiet Diffusion to all the people and assumption of the form it now exhibits.

The middle of the nineteenth century was the turning point. Before then it had been so to speak in gestation; under Soulouque, then ruling, it publicly emerged. Until the mid-century élite people had

16. Dr. J. Brown, *The History and Present Condition of St. Domingo*, II, 273.
17. John Candler, *Brief Notices of Hayti*, p. 166.
18. A. Bonneau, *Haïti: ses progrès—son avenir*, pp. 24–25.

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ignored when they did not frown upon it. As we have seen, the aristocratic Madiou spoke of Vaudoux as "the sorcerers of our country districts," and President Riché in 1846 whenever he heard a suspect drum, went himself to silence it. Under Soulouque, on the other hand, the élite did not dare to show contempt for practices so dear to His Imperial (if benighted) Highness; indeed, one priestess of Vodun then boasted, "If I were to beat the sacred drums and march through the city, not one from the Emperor downwards but would humbly follow me."

For at least a century Vodun had developed with no real obstacles beyond the twenty-year prohibition of the Three Great Blacks. The white planters in the colonial era had been too indifferent and imperceptive to stop it, while the élite of the republic were too proud to concern themselves. The Catholic Church, which might have been its most effective enemy, was too lax and too much hampered in colonial times to curb "slave superstition," while from 1805 until 1860 because of the schism no real Catholic priesthood labored in the country. All this changed after Soulouque: the schism was healed; priests of true missionary spirit came to Haiti; the *Affaire de Bizoton* gave the enemies of Vodun a focal point of attack. Since 1860 the Catholic Church has not ceased its war against the folk religion. Occasionally, as in the days of Toussaint, a ruler has suppressed it. Such executives have probably known, however, that it was much too late to eradicate Vodun. It had decades in which to send down its roots. Efforts against it have about the same effect as the persecution of the early Christians—a strengthening of the faith of believers, an outward submission to restrictive rules but increased devotion to rites now performed secretly, and in the case of Vodun at least, an added attraction to the cult because of this very secrecy. At least one president has been known to be an ardent worshiper. Today, much as the élite turn up their noses at Vodun, there are many who look to it in their hour of need, when the Catholic faith seems to fail or medicine proves helpless.

3. *Vodun Belief*

The sincere Vodun worshiper is generally an illiterate peasant or humble laborer who would never bother his mind to formulate a definite statement of his beliefs. Because there is no clearing-house

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for Vodun theology, nor any established order for the service, variety is one of its chief characteristics. Impossible as it is to cite a definitive list of Vodun beliefs, those most generally held might be combined into a Creed, which would run about as follows:

I believe in scores of gods and spirits, guardians of earth and sky, and of all things visible and invisible;

I believe that all these vodun (who are called "loa" or "mystères") are potent, although less majestic than *le bon Dieu* of the Christians; that some of them came with our ancestors from our former home in Africa, while others we have learned about in our Haitian fatherland; that these loa have power to possess us, their worshipers, informing us by inspiration of their needs and desires, which we must faithfully satisfy; that these loa, like us, are capable of good and evil, gentleness and anger, mercy and revenge;

I believe in the efficacy of sacrifice; in the pleasures of living; in respect due to twins; in the careful cult of the dead, who may return to our abodes; in the spiritual causation of diseases and misfortune; in the dance through which we may be "mounted" by our loa; in the possibility of interfering with the normal flow of events by means of magic; in the efficacy of charms and spells; and in the Holy Catholic Church.

Those who conceive of religion in terms of a rigid orthodoxy, monotheism, sin, a moral law, eternal rewards or punishments, will not understand Haitian Vodun. It is as hospitable to new spiritual conceptions as any faith could be, requiring only that the additions be applicable to life as it is lived in the Haitian hills and valleys, and that they adapt their shape and terminology to the native penchant. Monotheism is rarely the practical belief of simple people, but rather of *prophets and scholars. It is easy* enough to believe in an all-powerful god but much more difficult to arrive at a conception of a unique God. In Dahomey the people had reached some such stage of belief in omnipotence but not of uniqueness. When later, in slavery, transplanted Africans heard the Catholic doctrine of a god who ruled creation by the fiat of his conquering will, they assimilated the idea with a significant change: the Christian God became the Great Master of the other gods. The slaves very simply placed Him at the head of their pantheon. Even today, the first words of a Vodun service are the request for permission from the Great Master to go on with the service. As Dorsainvil says:

This term chosen to designate the supreme God was imposed on them by their environment. The colonist, the master, incarnated for the slave the

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highest idea of power and action. Logically, he could not conceive of the unique God of the Christians, by analogy and by inspiration, except in terms of the sentiment of fear mingled with the awe which the colonist inspired in him. Once this first step was taken, the rest was only the work of time. In the degree that the holy beings of Catholicism were unfolded to them, the creole Negroes everywhere identified these with the *vodun* (spirits) of the Dahomean cult."

The Christian God could not stop the "deifying" process, for Vodun must have simple spiritual explanations for daily occurrences. How could a god who ruled the earth clutter his mind with such small details as the mango crop or one's private aches? There was room of necessity for more, and lesser, gods.

Orthodoxy and monotheism, then, are alien to Vodun; so likewise are the notions of sin and a moral law. These also are refined ideas. The Catholic priests do their best to instill into the minds of the people the Church doctrine on these points, but gluttony, envy, sloth, and other deadly sins are not easy to explain to a people whose worldly goods are pitifully few, whose bellies are never full, and who must work hard to live at all. Just how the simple Haitian interprets the fulminations of the fathers against sin a foreigner can hardly tell, and the priests are not at liberty to reveal the secrets of the confessional.[20] A peasant loves life. His pleasures are simple enough, partly because he lacks money for expensive ones. Puritanical self-searching is alien to the normal Haitian. The touchstone is infallible: so long as life moves along smoothly one need not worry; if misfortune comes, one of the spirits is angry or out of sorts and his worshipers must propitiate him. What spirit could mind a man's dancing, drinking clairin, watching a cockfight, or otherwise indulging himself?

Vodun does not conceive life to be a struggle between good and evil. Its conception of spirits is anthropomorphic. No man is wholly good or wholly evil, nor is any god; human beings can generally be persuaded into any mood, and so can the gods; as there is variety in human personality, so likewise the gods are not immutable. Some are more to be feared than others, some may be regarded with tender affection, but all are capable of working both weal and woe.

19. Dumainvil, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

20. A priest once told me that a young Haitian girl in sorrow confessed, as her most heinous sin, that she had given food to a dog. Apparently her idea was that food was too precious to be given away to animals; hence she had sinned.

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A gentle spirit may cause great harm to a person who neglects his commands, while a spirit whose power makes possible the most malignant magic may bring good fortune to his devotee. By conceiving his spirits as in manner and desires resembling himself, the Haitian can understand his little universe without subjecting himself to the bewilderment which faces a simple Christian trying to reconcile an all-loving Father with the obvious evil He allows on earth.

One must approach Vodun without the religious preconceptions of Christianity or Judaism. Suspending our notions of orthodoxy, monotheism, sin, heaven, and hell, we may examine more closely the creed suggested above, in an endeavor to round out its real meaning to the Haitian.

"I believe in gods and spirits . . ." The white man would recognize most easily among the Haitian's multiple gods the God of Christianity whom every Vodun worshiper confesses. It is this God who is meant in the homely expression of native acceptance of one's lot: "*Bon Dieu bon*"—the good God is really good, however remote. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are likewise acknowledged, although it seems probable that they do not touch the hearts of people as much as the Great Master. The Blessed Virgin, on the other hand, is very real and near—so real, in fact, that she is sometimes actually merged with a spirit of African origin who has many of the Virgin's storied characteristics. Certain angels and a select group of Christian saints have made a special appeal and so found their niche in Vodun; others are not denied but merely ignored because the Haitian is not well acquainted with them.

To the spirits (one hesitates to use such misleading words as "gods" or "divinities") not drawn from Christianity the name "loa" is applied. There seem in general to be two classes of these: those who have an African origin, and those with a Haitian background only. The former group is called "Rada," the latter "Pétro." The word Rada is derived from the principality of Allada in Dahomey, and would seem thus to indicate that all the Rada loa were Dahomean; this, however, is definitely not the case. Numerous loa can be traced to the Congo region and others to the smaller West African districts, yet all of these are indiscriminately called Rada. In current usage, accordingly, the word has lost its strict geographical significance. The term Pétro is explained in an illuminating paragraph by the Haitian savant, Dr. Dorsainvil:

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steadying his attention, he practically hypnotizes him back into full consciousness. As soon as the possessed is normal again, water out of the calabash is poured at the central post and a sign of the cross is made with the candle before it.

Contrary to the expectation of thrill-seeking white visitors, the Vodun dance does not merit the name of an orgy. True, the dancers wear their old clothes, for they are going to have violent exercise; true also, those who are possessed give the impression of losing some of their inhibitions. But the dancers do not embrace each other as at a white man's dance; the drinking which occurs is hardly ever excessive; and the climax of a successful dance is a religious experience. The Haitian is no more obsessed by sex than is the American; indeed, living simply and without many of the artificial restraints of "civilization," he is probably less so. What white visitors sometimes see, under the impression that they are witnessing a Vodun dance, is nothing more than a secular Saturday night social dance. It, too, has drum rhythms instead of an orchestra, musical instruments being rare in Haiti; but the dance has no more religious (or "Voodoo") significance than a barn dance in the United States.

Creed and practice go hand in hand in Haiti. The Vodun worshiper believes in the loa of his faith and does the things necessary to get in touch with them. These conceptions are the major part of his creed, as the corresponding actions form the bulk of his religious activity.

A few articles of the creed remain. "I believe in respect to twins . . ." Hundreds of so-called primitive peoples see in twins some special significance, now fortunate, now tragic. Many of the tribes along the Atlantic coast of Africa thought of twins as an omen, so that the presence of ritual regard for them in Haiti is hardly surprising. It is probably incorrect to speak of the worship, or the cult, of twins, for they are not deified, nor is there a common ritual for them: thousands of persons pay them no homage whatever. One family has a high regard for twins because it has numbered them among its ancestors or recent relatives; another family pays respect to all twins because a priest has advised seeking the good luck which comes from *marassa* (twins). There seems to be some confusion of thought about this aspect of religion: twins are not gods, but merely omens from the gods; yet sacrifices are made to them. Christmas and harvest are the usual seasons for the offering. Food is prepared in the morning

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the dead a right to whatever their survivors possess, and moreover gives them the right to return to earth as ghosts."

Strict rules of mourning prevail, both as regards clothing and behavior. The slightest lapse in the observation of these rules would cause resentment on the part of the dead; fear of retribution would be quite enough to ensure conformity even if public opinion did not. Ghosts have the power to possess mortals, not as the loa do at a Vodun service or dance, but in the manner understood by American Negroes who say they have been "ha'nted," and so, continually thinking of the dead, live in nervous fear of a streak of bad luck. Such possession is a form of persecution, with continual consequent bad luck until the survivor has carried out all his obligations. It is especially significant, however, that a departed spirit takes vengeance only in matters thought by the Haitian to concern the Church. The ghost is not whimsical in his possession of mortals, and cannot resist treatment which is his due. The kind of treatment given a corpse depends upon the kind of death he died: a person struck by lightning, for example, would have no ceremonies at all, for lightning is an act of God.

Where the cult of the dead departs entirely from the teachings of the Church is in the matter of magic, a topic shortly to be treated. It may be briefly stated here that ghosts can be summoned back by special adepts for purposes of divination; that certain corpses are thought to be revivified by evil persons who use these soulless, pathetic automata as slaves (these are the notorious *zombis*); and that black magic—that is, powerful influence for evil—can be worked by sorcerers who know how to command ghosts.

All other articles of the Vodun creed not already discussed, except one, come under the heading of magic. That exception is the statement: "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." The fact is as simple as the affirmation. If the Catholic priests fight Vodun, preaching frequently against its beliefs and practices, that is unfortunate, think the peasants: Vodun does not retaliate by fighting Catholicism. God and the saints have their province, and the loa theirs. The mind of the Haitian is simple enough to accept both sets of spiritual beings, and not philosophical enough to worry over the contradiction. Practically every Vodun worshiper thinks of himself as a Catholic."

31. See Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

32. In this sketch of the Vodun creed, it has been constantly emphasized that each locality has its own variations both in belief and practice. The reader who is interested in pursuing the subject further should consult the works of Price-Mars, Herskovits, Dorsainvil, Parsons, Hurston, et al. See Bibliography.

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4. *Magic*

• 771 It is difficult enough to make a distinction between religion and superstition; it is practically impossible, in dealing with a people who in their closeness to nature are not accustomed to the refinements of "civilized" thinking, to make one between magic and certain aspects of religion. Underlying both is belief in the supernatural; characteristic of both is a faith which recognizes a higher order of cause and effect operating with the lower one familiar in commonplace matters. Anthropologists hold various theories about magic, some saying that it is the set of practices out of which religion evolved, others that it exists for personal and practical ends and has little to do with religion; still others that it is a development out of religion, paralleling and complementing it.[35]

771 One element which distinguishes religious practice from magic is
781 the attitude toward spirits. In religion, the worshiper pays homage
782 and humbly petitions, preserving meanwhile an attitude of humility to spirits or gods who must be propitiated; in magic, the human being, by coercive words and actions, commands the services of spirits who (if the magical rites have been properly performed) must obey. The distinction is not between good and evil, for a god may have both characteristics and be entirely capable of working harm to mortals. As already noted, in the Haitian system the gods are like men in being mixtures of both principles.

771 Another difference between religion and magic concerns time.
789 Religion is social, open to all worshipers or at least to all of a group
796 or social rank. Its rites are continually and repeatedly performed. Magic, on the contrary, though sometimes public and social, is generally private and, since it is for a specific purpose, is performed only when the need arises. A man who was thoroughly conversant with magic might go through his whole life without ever feeling the need of employing it or having to exert himself to fend it off. One turns to magic as a sophisticated man might turn to medicine. Either may be done without; both may be used to excess.

789 In Haitian Vodun, magic interweaves itself with the general faith.
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35. See, for example, Ruth Benedict, "Magic," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, X, 39–44; A. Goldenweiser, *Early Civilization* (New York, 1922), chaps. X–XI; J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London, 1907–15), *passim*; R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion* (New York, 1914), *passim*; and Sumner and Keller, *op. cit.*, II, chaps. XXIX–XXXI.

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pronounced; later the lightning will strike, the disease will come, the child will die: the connection between curse and calamity will seem too obvious for contradiction. About certain persons is a look (some call it an aura) of evil which is almost palpable: folk belief has an explanation. For much of the mysterious coincidence in life a sophisticate will simply shrug his shoulders and attempt no explanation; he accepts his doctor's diagnosis or his lawyer's advice, and when these betray him falls back upon the many insurances of civilization. The Haitian needs an explanation for his ills, for he lacks doctors, lawyers, insurance: the explanation of magic may be incorrect, but it is the only one he has and it is backed up by events often enough to seem true.

Life is full of mishaps. The Haitian's loa are as real to him as the mountains and trees of his country. It is not to be wondered, therefore, that the peasant thinks his loa directly responsible for much of the evil that befalls. In this explanation the Haitian is not different from millions of other people, even Christians. It would, however, be a great mistake to emphasize the fear in Vodun faith and in the magic which proceeds from it to such an extent that the bright side is forgotten. The gods are likewise responsible for the good luck of mankind. If a man deeply desires to attain a specific good, there is room in both religion and magic for that also. It may be the love of a girl, money to pay a debt, a propitious day for holding a *coumbite* (or coöperative working bee), the birth of a son instead of a daughter: religion and magic avail for all of these, more with some individuals than with others. When an entire community holds a belief, the magic has a double chance of working. It is easier for a man to win his wife if she knows he is working magic to that end, than to persuade her without magic. This kind of magic is also easier to work than that which depends wholly upon the complaisance of the loa, as when rain is needed for crops at the proper time.

Religion, with its sister magic, is not for the Haitian a matter of special days, vague abstractions, or formal propriety. It is a daily strength for daily needs.

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VIII

RELIGIOUS BORROWINGS

ROMAN Catholicism in Haiti is, as we have seen, the officially approved, socially proper, and outwardly recognized religion. Vodun, on the contrary, is legislated against and driven into the background by the élite who are ashamed to have foreigners see the power in their country of a folk religion which has its crude side. These two are Haiti's faiths.

No one takes a census in Haiti, for the peasants have their suspicions of officials who pry into personal affairs. There is consequently no way of knowing precisely how many Haitians regard themselves as "belonging" to the Catholic Church. The priests list the whole population of a diocese as Catholic. In so doing they are probably not far wrong, for although not every person gets to confession each year or attends to his other religious duties, certainly nineteen out of twenty Haitians, élite and common folk alike, would claim to be Catholics. On the whole, it may be that the simple people are more sincere in this, for they are not touched with skepticism where things spiritual are concerned.

In the United States censuses of religious bodies, if an individual is listed as a member of one denomination he cannot be listed as a member of another. We are trained to religious exclusiveness: we are either Baptists *or* Methodists, Jews *or* Catholics. Not every people, however, has schooled itself to such sharp distinctions. The Japanese Buddhist may regard himself as a worshiper of Shinto as well; the Chinese can be Taoist and Confucian at the same time. By our rigidity we deny ourselves a great deal of inner comfort: I may like the earnest fervor of the Missionary Baptists but like as well the stately ritual of Anglo-Catholicism; I must accept one or the other, however, for if I am a member of the former sect I cannot at the same time be admitted to all the rights and privileges of the latter. There is probably a spiritual compensation resulting from such single-minded allegiance, but we are frequently forced to deny

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validity to forms and ideas which we know, in our hearts, might sustain us.'

The Haitian peasant is not interested in making formal distinctions. If he is critical, it is only of results, rarely of the means used to obtain those results. If he cannot gain his ends in one way he is not too proud to try another, and still a third. Nineteen out of twenty Haitians, then, being Roman Catholics in religion, are likewise worshipers of Vodun. There is so much mystery in the world, so much misfortune, beauty, sorrow, and joy that it would be unthinkable to deny God or the gods: mankind has worship enough for them all, and need enough of them all. There is to the peasant no conflict between Vodun and Catholicism; the two are complementary, even if sometimes the Catholic priests make coöperation impossible.

Let us recall for a moment the earlier history of the country. In the days of slavery one may imagine the Church would have found it difficult, even if its priests and planters had been willing, to train all the blacks as thorough Catholics. Some concepts took root, some rites immediately appealed. Below the surface, however, the African ideas of the preponderant Dahomeans were spreading through the plantations. In the crucial early days of independence, when the customs and social institutions of the Haitians (as Haitians, not as expatriate slaves) were in process of formation, the country's rulers were not deeply religious; moreover the State was in open schism from the Church. For fifty-five years no approved churchman was at work with the people. The seventy men whom some historians mention as priests were on the whole venal and self-seeking, even vicious. Their least concern was to wean the people away from their superstitions, for precisely in these folk beliefs lay the greatest source of gain. By the time the breach between State and Church was healed it was too late to make single-minded Catholics of the Haitian peasants. They would accept what the new and active priests taught them, but not to the exclusion of what they had believed for a century.

With the élite the Church has had more success; assiduous teach-

1. This either-or dichotomy is not limited to religion: we divide ourselves similarly in politics, family life, residence, and so on. If I am a Lutheran, a Republican, a married man with a home in New York, I cannot at the same time be an Episcopalian, a Democrat, and a voter in Chicago with a second spouse and family there. What is impossible and ridiculous for Americans, however, is in some ways the normal course of life for the Haitian.

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565 ing since 1860 has had its effect upon the children of the upper classes.
• 771 Two hundred churchmen working with a population of more than two million cannot distribute their benefits equally. Teachers must devote themselves to those whose minds are educable, who have access to schools, and who can afford time for daily classes. An element of social snobbishness entered as well. Catholicism was socially accepted in the Western World whose approval the élite coveted, where Vodun if known at all was regarded as a mere superstition. To prove his separation from the peasant black, the élite person was therefore Catholic or nothing.

[777] It would have required many times two hundred teaching brothers and sisters, all with the zeal of fanatics and the energy of dynamos, to convert the masses away from Vodun. In acquainting the peasants with Church forms and certain beliefs the priests have been entirely successful; in making exclusive Catholics of them they have had no success at all.

771 Every vital social institution is continually in a process of change.
177 Vodun, a very living faith, has steadily borrowed more and more from Catholicism, the only other religion with which the people come in close contact. When one can go from a Saturday night Vodun sacrifice and dance to a Sunday morning Catholic Mass with no feeling of incongruity, it is obvious that the minds of the worshipers are actively predisposed to assimilation of creed and ritual.

796 We have suggested in a previous chapter some traces of the Catholic Mass in Vodun ceremony. The Vodun service regularly begins with a long ritual which the observer who knows both the Créole language and the Catholic liturgy recognizes as being almost entirely Roman. While the Vodun houngan sits quietly by, a special officiant known as the *prêt' savanne* (bush priest) reads or pretends to read from the Catholic prayer book. For the Pater Noster, the creed, the Ave Maria, the Salve Regina, and the prayers, the worshipers kneel or stand as they would in church. Candles burn, water is sprinkled, the sign of the cross is made, the chants are sung. When the benediction completes this part of the service, the houngan takes over to conduct the purely African rites; yet his first words are, "*Grâce mize'-ricorde*," and many Catholic interpolations appear even in this second part of the service.

[778] The Vodun ritual is conducted before an altar, in Haitian Créole
[192] called a "*reine*," which is a perfect marriage between Vodun and

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marvelously aided in distress. The priest, not willing to allow even this "delusion," tried to cut down the tree but was wounded by his own machete. Eventually, however, the tree was destroyed by natural causes, and a church erected on the site. Fire destroyed the church. Each successive church building has likewise been destroyed, by fire or by lightning. No longer now does the Catholic Church combat the sanctity of Saut d'Eau: after all, it was the Virgin who appeared, not a loa. The great celebrations on every fifteenth of July draw pilgrims from all over Haiti. Although the Church now grudgingly approves the feast it is still recognizably Vodun in character, for devout souls who bathe in the water are "mounted" by loa. The Church has a hard battle ahead of it to win this festival for Catholicism.

Three factors work in favor of the Catholic struggle to win Haitians completely away from Vodun: the world-wide organization of the Church, which can always throw trained reserves into the battle; the superior intellectual equipment of the priests, enabling them to plan their campaign and use psychological weapons; and the plasticity of Vodun itself, which is a conglomeration of human feelings, ideas, and traditions rather than a rigid sect with an inflexible ritual.[1] Even with these advantages, it is still the battle of a few dozen men on one side with the Haitian masses (more than two million) on the other. So far as one is ever justified in prophecy, it seems safe to assume that Vodun will continue to assimilate more and more fragments of Catholicism; that its appeal will remain so long as education and medicine are not extended to the whole countryside; that eventually—it may be centuries hence—Vodun rites may sink back into the status of living folklore, to which the simple turn in their deepest need.

One of the strongest missionary advantages of the Roman Catholic Church has been the breadth given it by two thousand years of experience. In so long a life it has had to be all things to all men; out of necessity it has developed around the central core so wide a variety of belief, doctrine, form, and traditional practice, that there is something for every believer, whether scholarly or unnatured, powerfully important or humbly obscure. What the cultivated

1. The absence of any written formulation of Vodun must certainly be a factor in its flexibility. Recorded tradition and written history tend to create definiteness of pattern.

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WHAT THE CULTIVATED

[177] member of the Haitian élite takes from Catholicism is quite different
177 probably from what the peasant absorbs: the point is that the peasant
[184] does not find the faith either incomprehensible, or uncongenial to his own tradition and penchants—as he might find the tenets of, say, Unitarianism or Presbyterianism. It is easy to fit the Trinity, the Virgin, the saints, the Mass, holy water, Lent, and practically every other external aspect of belief and ritual into his mental set. He makes his own selection and his own reconciliations. It seems the most natural thing in the world to him to light a candle and make the sign of the cross as he baptizes a new drum for use in the Vodun dance. The Haitian peasant, in fact, makes a tranquil unity of his two religions, so much the obvious oneness of his universe.

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562 The male, by contrast, is master in all matters, including those pertaining to home life. Obviously, he is much freer in his sexual life than is his wife.

586 Divorce is comparatively rare, thanks to the careful solicitude of all parties before formal marriage is contracted, and to the disapproval of the Catholic Church. Since the husband is not, by custom or by public opinion, bound to limit his sexual attentions to his legal wife, one of the common causes of divorce is removed. The code [837] allows formal divorce to the husband for the wife's adultery, and to the wife for her husband's adultery "when he shall bring his concubine into the common dwelling house." Both spouses may secure divorce for excess, for injurious cruelty, for life sentences imposed by [587] a court—"*peines afflictives et infamantes.*" A woman whose marriage has been dissolved by divorce cannot remarry before the expiration of one year, nor is she permitted to remarry her former husband. [562] The opposition of the Church to divorce is a distinct deterrent to elite [771] women who crave freedom, for women are generally the more devout members of the Church.

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minister or an outstanding intellectual. Variations are frequently (some even say generally) mere casual accidents, surprising inspirations of the moment. The changes which have come over the face of the Vodun religion are examples: in almost no instance can the additions or emendations be traced back to their originators, yet Vodun is clearly different now from what it was in Boyer's time. Just as no one knows who initiates a change in the folkway of language, coining a slang phrase, modifying a pronunciation, so the makers of most variations in folkways and mores are anonymous.

Given infinite time and patience, one might compile a list of mores in any country, beginning first with those which require absolute conformity from all persons, and running down to those which express social ideals but which may nevertheless be honored in the breach. In our own country, the mores condemning incest and cannibalism are not only our rules but our unanimous practice; and if a person breaks either we punish him severely. At the other end of our list are those mores requiring truthfulness and honor. In calling these American mores we pay homage to an ideal—and then tell our white lies as a part of the observance of social amenities, or make our "shrewd" business deals in order to get on in the world. For neither of these breaches of the mores is there any concerted social punishment; on the contrary, we have been known to praise those who broke them. In describing the culture of a society, therefore, it is necessary to report both the mores as ideal and the mores as practice.

The larger and more complex a society becomes, the fewer the mores shared in common by all members of that society. In a small colonial American village, isolated from much contact with strangers, the whole population was bound by scores of mores touching all phases of life. In modern America, on the contrary, if one should consider American society as a whole it would probably be difficult to find a dozen mores shared commonly by us all, or if shared, exerting the same force to conformity. We have had to develop a measure of tolerance with our 130 million neighbors, a live-and-let-live principle which has been aptly called "antagonistic coöperation."

Each district in Haiti, in the effective isolation of illiteracy and sedentary life, has developed its own characteristic mores, of which a limited number correspond with those of other Haitian districts. It is these general correspondences which have been treated in this book. Within each district, likewise, there is the usual hierarchy of rules